ON THE

BENEVOLENCE AND RECTITUDE

OF THE

SUPREME BEING.

BY

ASA SHINN.

God is Love.

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. —— *John.*

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PREFACE.

The following pages were written with conscientious solicitude to avoid error, and to advance such truth as will have the surest tendency to promote the present and eternal happiness of mankind; from a settled conviction that it is the interest of all men to understand and to believe the truth, and that if we voluntarily adhere to any modification of error, we do it to our own hurt, and to the injury of our fellow-creatures.

The reader's candid attention is respectfully requested; and he is solicited to pursue the following investigation, in the order in which it is exhibited. It is hoped he will read the book through regularly, as the best and perhaps the only way in which he can do justice to the truth, to the author, or to himself. If in his progress he shall meet with sentiments and conclusions which may be calculated to disturb preconceived opinions, let him be composed, and patiently read on: perhaps in a subsequent part of the work he will find these matters explained or qualified, or peradventure sustained with an amount of evidence which will carry his own

best judgment along with it. Truth will injure no man; and sound evidence will never support error upon this or any other subject of intelligent inquiry.

If the reader, after surveying the whole ground, should still have doubts concerning the correctness of any leading sentiment, let him give the book a second reading, with a view to ascertain where the author missed his way, and by what illusive appearances of proof he unhappily imposed upon his own understanding. After this matter shall have been ascertained, it may be well for the reader to exercise a sufficient degree of mental effort to answer the question satisfactorily to himself, — By what methods are the arguments of this book to be set aside, or explained away, on supposition that these arguments are really on the side of error?

The time has passed away, for evidence to be nullified by an appeal to authority, or inquiry silenced, by sounding the alarm of novelty and heterodoxy. If our creeds cannot bear examination, their correctness ought to be suspected; and so far as they rest on a permanent foundation, a vigorous and candid scrutiny will only make it manifest that they cannot be shaken, because they are *founded upon a rock.*

This is peculiarly an age of benevolent enterprise. The benevolence of the Supreme Being, which is the theme of the present treatise, is the foundation of them all; and on this they depend for all their salutary efficiency. Were the Almighty of an opposite character,

all benevolent efforts would either be direct hostility against him, or would be unconnected with any of his governing purposes. But if he be essentially benevolent, then all associations of this description may confidently look up to him for his all-sufficient protection.

In case any one of the philanthropic societies of the present day should be charged with being only *half* benevolent;—with being actuated by contradictory principles, and aiming at the production of absolute misery, as one of its ultimate objects;—would not its members view this charge as a very great reproach? To guard the character of the Supreme Being from such a reproach, is the design of the following pages. If the reader should hesitate concerning any sentiment here advanced, let him weigh the subject well, and examine whether it be possible on any other ground to sustain the proposition, that Almighty God is really a good Being. To suppose that the Divine Mind carries an infinite contradiction within itself, is an absurdity as untenable as Atheism; and any tenet which necessarily involves this consequence, even though its antiquity be equal to that of Manicheism, is as certainly false, as it is indubitable that God himself is true. A perfectly good being is always consistent with himself; his object is benevolent, not in some things merely, but in all things; and his invariable disposition is as far removed from all *favouritism*, on the one hand, as it is from a relentless *tyranny*, on the other. This is the true key to the whole of the following investigation; and the

reader is respectfully requested to carry it along with him, as a needful test, with which to measure all the doctrines that will be submitted to his deliberate and candid inspection.

The author believes that the salvation of human souls is accomplished through the instrumentality of truth, impressed by clear evidence upon the judgment, and not by a mere appeal to the passions of the heart. A man must have right thoughts of God, before he can exercise right affections towards him. The feelings ought indeed to be excited; but this excitement must result from the impressive views and convictions of the understanding, or it will be *like the morning cloud, and the early dew.* The word of God tells us that we are "chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth;" and that the reason why men are lost, is that "they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2 Thess. ii. 10—13.) Therefore the evidence of truth must be presented in all its clearness and force in order for men to believe it, and with its native attractions in order for them to love it; and if they be influenced both to *believe* and to *love* the truth, God says they will thereby be saved. Hence the reader will be assured, that the following argumentative investigation has been pursued, not with a view to indulge in metaphysical speculations, but from an impressive conviction that the author could not pursue any other method that would be more effectual, in promoting the happiness and salvation of mankind. If

men will not *think*, they cannot be saved; and the more they employ their mental energies, in following sound evidence in all the extent of its application, the more thoroughly will truth get hold of their intellectual and moral faculties, and the more permanently will it seat itself in the affections of their hearts.

Hence our obligation is sacred, to use our best endeavours to find the truth, and to diffuse it through society as extensively as we can; and all efforts to hinder mankind from availing themselves of every aid to distinguish truth from error, are as antichristian as they are unreasonable. Protestants ought not, in the midst of their remonstrances against Popery, to imitate the Roman Catholic Church, in her attempts, both by authority and management, to impede the progress of truth and knowledge amongst the people. If the several Protestant sects make their *creed* the standard to which the *Bible* must yield, by subjecting the latter to a strictly sectarian course of expounding, wherein do they differ from Papists? If they have a right to pursue this course, Roman Catholics have exactly the same right; and of course were justifiable in using their utmost power and policy to prevent the Reformation.

We are told in ecclesiastical history that Heretics had greatly troubled the church for several hundred years. And pray, when were the Heretics subdued, and when was pure orthodox truth rendered undisturbed and triumphant? Was it at the time of the *Crusades*, or not until after the establishment of the *Inquisition?*

What ecclesiastical historian can give us information on this point?

All Protestant denominations have practically said that the church of Rome is herself a Heretic; and hence they have cast off her authority, and have unanimously protested against her various errors and corruptions. They ought not, therefore, to assume the same infallible position which they so strenuously deny to the Mother Church; nor should they resort to similar measures, to hinder reason and revelation from having the fair and unobstructed attention of mankind. It is obvious as the light of heaven, that there is no way for Protestants to avoid these practical contradictions, but to discontinue sectarian intrigue, and to leave the souls of all men free to regulate their faith by an attentive and candid examination of evidence; that they may not be tempted to yield a passive and unmanly submission to the dictates of human authority.

On these grounds the liberty may be allowed, for the author to entreat all Protestant Christians not to use unfair efforts to hinder the following arguments from finding their way through society; but on the contrary, let candid Christians lend their friendly assistance to call off the public attention from novels and vain amusements, to the study of that Divine Character, which is the perfection of all beauty, the standard of all excellence, and the source of all felicity.

THE AUTHOR.

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PART FOURTH.

OBLIGATIONS ON MANKIND RESULTING FROM THE DIVINE CHARACTER.

INTRODUCTION.

Serious and thoughtful minds have often laboured with perplexity, and have been more or less afflicted with doubt, in regard to the perfect goodness of the Supreme Being. They find that the proofs of this great truth are strong and impressive; but perceive them to be connected at the same time, with certain obscurities which they cannot comprehend; and they find their minds embarrassed by apparent difficulties in nature, and more still, perhaps, by gloomy views exhibited in existing systems of theology. Hence they feel that any thing calculated to relieve their conceptions on this point, would be an advantage to them of no common interest and value.

The essential character of God is a subject of primary importance to the whole intelligent universe. On this depends the reformation of the sinner, the perseverance of the saint, the consolation of the afflicted and dying, and the perpetual tranquillity of all the hosts of heaven. A sinner may be terrified by mere apprehensions of punishment; but a true and sentimental repent-

ance will never take place in his mind, nor a genuine reformation in his life, till he shall have some tolerably correct views concerning the excellency of the Divine nature. The *goodness* of God must lead him to repentance. For it is opposition to a good Being, and to a good law, which has rendered his own character a *bad* one. This evil of his heart and life, the penitent honestly acknowledges; which implies a full admission in his intelligence, that the Being against whom he has been standing in opposition, is as *excellent* as he himself is *vile*. Without such a conviction, there can be no sentimental repentance; and if repentance be not *sentimental*, how can it be *sincere?*

The same will hold, in regard to *confidence* in God. How can a sinner receive the record which God gave of his Son, but on the ground that God is a being of perfect veracity, whose record is always true? How can he cordially embrace the plan of Redemption, without being convinced that *love* was the source of it? How can he trust in Christ, without believing that he is trust-worthy? or how follow him in the way, without being persuaded that he is a perfectly good conductor, who will not deceive him, or lead him into misery? It is equally evident, that the same confidence in the character of God must continue with a man through life; for on this confidence depends all virtue and happiness; and the more clear and steady a person's views are, concerning the absolute rectitude and excellency of the Divine Being, the more permanent will be his principles

of moral action. Hence, the supreme importance of this subject is easily perceived.

Much talent has been employed, to prove that there is a God. This is indeed very necessary; but it sustains only one half of the truth; and without the other half, this would produce no effect, except perhaps to fill the world with terror and consternation. It is in vain to prove that there is a Supreme Being, unless it be proved equally that he is a Good Being. He may be supreme in power, in understanding, and in many other attributes; but this is the great question—is he supreme in Benevolence? If this be not true, atheism itself would be a refuge to every thinking mind; for an Almighty Being of an evil disposition, were such a thing possible, would destroy the value of every other truth, and would cast the whole universe into a gloomy prospect, infinitely worse than that of universal annihilation.

He that cometh to God must believe that *he is*, and that he is *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* The first embraces his existence, and the second his essential character. This great and fundamental truth is the basis of all virtue and felicity. It is the brilliant Sun which illuminates created minds, attracts and purifies our moral powers, melts our affections, gives sublimity and grandeur to nature, promotes the harmony of society, and trains up millions of souls for the blessedness of immortality.

But the atheist says there is no God. Then there is

no Author or Owner of the world—no Almighty Father and Friend of the human race. The universe is a blank, and existence a calamity! By Chance we came into life, and by the same Chance we may continue to live and suffer to all eternity! In vain does the unbeliever soothe his soul with the prospect of an eternal sleep; for by what argument can he prove that we will not live by chance in eternity, as certainly as we have lived by chance in time? And whether our future state will chance to be a heaven or a hell, no atheist is able to inform us. If it be a heaven, no thanks to any intelligent author; and if a hell, no hope from any parental guardian or friend, to save us from its horrors. On this dreadful uncertainty, what considerate man would not lament that he ever opened his eyes upon the light, or ever breathed the vitality of the atmosphere?

It is not the present design to pursue in detail the proofs of a Divine Intelligent Existence. This has been done with great ability, by Dr. Paley in the last century, and by lord Brougham and Dr. Chalmers in the present; and the works of those authors are well worth an attentive and candid examination. The second branch of the subject, that God is *a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, or that he is essentially a *benevolent* Being, though incidentally introduced and proved by many authors, yet may perhaps be susceptible of a further illustration. Its illustration is attempted in the following pages; and the subject is exhibited in such a light as will, it is hoped, be satisfactory to inquiring and

anxious minds, by tending to relieve them from some of their deepest mental perplexities.

A subject so universally and superlatively interesting as this, ought to be examined in all its import and consequences; and its bearings should be traced in the whole extent of their application to the Divine government through time and through eternity. To rest in a general and vague acknowledgment that God is good, without surveying the proofs and results of his goodness, is like a mere profession that we are in favour of *truth*, while we refuse to follow it in its connections and dependences, in order as far as possible to distinguish it from error. To acknowledge that God is good, and at the same time to hold fast to such doctrines as essentially contradict his goodness, is to refuse him that homage of the mind and heart, which is due to Him from every intelligent being.

The conclusion appears plain, therefore, that both interest and moral obligation call upon us to examine this subject with all candour, and with a persevering exercise of our utmost mental energies; in order thereby to secure our own well-being, to improve the morals and happiness of society, and to advance the honour and glory of our Creator.

PART FIRST.

PRELIMINARY.

SECTION I.

The nature of Good and Evil.

THESE words are applied both to matter and to mind; but they can only be applied to the former, on account of its connection with the latter. If there were no minds in existence, matter would be good for nothing; because matter has no life and feeling in itself, and the words good and evil can have no meaning, excepting so far as they relate to beings alive, and who are consequently capable of happiness or misery. Hence it appears that *good* is that which produces *happiness*, and *evil* is that which produces *misery*. Whether we speak of solids or liquids, agents or instruments, food or drink, medicines or poisons, we call that good which tends to promote our well-being, and that evil which leads us into any kind or degree of essential happiness.

But what do we mean when we speak of a good or an evil *mind?* We mean a mind that is *disposed* to

communicate happiness or misery. A good *disposition* comprehends the *affections*, and implies that the individual is *delighted* in doing good; or that he himself is happy, in the act of making others so. Goodness in a mind, therefore, consists in those principles or mental properties, which furnish enjoyment, both to the individual himself, and to others who come under the influence of his voluntary actions. *A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good.*

Now when we inquire concerning God, whether he is a good Being or not, how is it possible to arrive at any conclusion, unless we take the word *good* in the same sense in which we apply it to other minds? His attributes, it may be said, are a great mystery; and though he is infinitely good, yet the word goodness when predicated of him, signifies something *else* than when applied to his creatures. Then can any creature conceive what *else* its import is? We may talk about an infinite unknown *something;* but to us it must be a nonentity, till we are able to form some conception of its nature; and if it have no resemblance to any thing found in the human spirit, how can it afford any aid to our conceptions, concerning the inquiry whether our Maker be a *good* Being or not? We do not ask whether he be an infinite something which we do not understand; but whether he possess that moral excellence which we do understand. Our Saviour says "God is a spirit." Now it is obvious that so far only as we un-

derstand what the word *spirit* means, can we receive instruction from this proposition. The Apostle John says "God is love;" but if we know not what the word *love* means, we are as ignorant of God as we were before we received this information. The same may be said of *justice*, *mercy*, and *veracity:* when our Creator claims these principles, as belonging to himself, he speaks of what he knows we understand, or may understand, by consulting the consciousness of our own minds.

Such principles as these, or their opposites, constitute that which we mean by the word *character*. Good intentions, or good principles of action, constitute a good character; the contrary, a bad one; and he who has no principles of action, has no character at all. Can this last be said of our Creator?

It may be thought, perhaps, that the Almighty is so great a *sovereign*, as to be *above* all character, and perfectly independent of principle; that he has a right to regulate his actions by *any* motive, and that any moral system which he might form would be made right and good, by his act of forming it in his mind. As well might we say, he never formed a plan of operations in consequence of his perceiving it to be a wise plan, but that his act of forming and pursuing it *made* it a wise one, whatever it might be! That when he *says* any thing, he does not say it because *it is* true, but because his saying it will *make* it true, and would have so made its *contrary!* When God created the world in the

manner he did, it was because "God saw that it was good;" but according to the above supposition, he might have done the *reverse* of what he has done, both in his natural and moral productions, and yet the whole would have been very good! Whether the attributing of such sovereignty as this to our Creator would not degrade instead of exalting him, let all intelligent spirits judge. Shall a sovereign majesty be too great to be good, or claim a right to trample all right beneath his feet? In regard to the actions of such a sovereign, benevolence, justice, and truth could have no opposites; and hence it would follow, that the greatest and best of all characters, is that which knows no distinction between right and wrong! It would involve the egregious contradiction, that a being can have a right to do wrong, or to change the one into the other. If these positions are too absurd to be admitted, we appear to be fairly entitled to the conclusion, that God really has a *character*, consisting of essential attributes, or principles of action; and that it would be impossible for him to act upon opposite principles, without forming for himself an *opposite* character, and consequently a *bad* one.

The reader must bear with these metaphysical distinctions; for they are manifestly essential to the honour of our Creator, and to produce in us that love and veneration which are so becoming in creatures, and so justly due to His eternal majesty.

Vague conceptions concerning this important subject,

will be unspeakably injurious; and it is the wisdom and duty of intelligent creatures to use their best endeavours to form clear and definite views of the Divine Character, on which depend all mental and moral improvement, as well as all satisfying and permanent enjoyment through earth and heaven.

SECTION II.

The true Character of Deity stated.—Importance of knowing its bearing upon the Christian Revelation.

Every moral character must be either *good* or *bad*, without mixture, or must be a *compound*, partly good and partly evil. It is presumed that this is a complete enumeration; for no other alternative appears possible.

Now we must believe that God is perfectly *good*, or entirely *evil*, or that he is a *compound* of opposite qualities. The first is the professed belief of most Christians; the second has probably never had an advocate; but the third, that in God there is a combination of good and evil, was openly taught by an ancient sect; and it seems to be *implied* in the doctrines of no inconsiderable number of creeds, both ancient and modern. If it be true, one manifest consequence of it appears to be, that there is an eternal *conflict* in the Divine Mind, and that the happiness of God is impaired, in proportion as the

evil part of his character operates against the good. This we know to be the result of good and evil, as they conflict with each other in ourselves; and what reason can we have to believe our Creator is free from misery, but because he is free from the internal causes of it?

Grant then that God is perfectly good, without any imperfection whatever, and it will follow, that there is no *duplicity*, *variation*, or *contradiction* in the Divine Mind. Can that which is purely and unchangeably good, ever contradict itself? We speak of *justice*, *faithfulness*, *truth* and *veracity*, as belonging to our Creator. Are not all these attributes parts of a *good* character? Is not justice a *good* thing? Then how can it contradict any thing else that is good? Surely justice stands opposed to nothing but to that which is unjust; it eternally supports every thing that is *right*, and only opposes *wrong;* consequently, if there is no wrong in God, there is nothing in him which justice ever opposes, or hinders from having its full operation. God is in one mind, and there is no attribute in him which in any moment of eternal duration can cause him to be "double-minded." Let this position be sustained by authority.

Dr. Dwight says, "The *benevolence* of God is his *whole moral character*. This divine disposition is the boundless energy of the infinite Mind; the intense and immeasurable love of doing good, unceasingly, and endlessly, producing that happiness, in which it delights.

We commonly speak of the moral character of God, as compounded of many separate attributes; of goodness, bounty, mercy, truth, justice, faithfulness, and patience. The exercises of benevolence are so numerous, and so diversified, as to need, if we would consider them clearly, and usefully, to be arranged in different classes, denoted by different names, and separately contemplated by our minds. Still, it is also useful to remember what the Scriptures have taught us in the text, that *the whole character of God is love;* an intense and eternal flame of *uncompounded good-will.*" Dwight's Theology. Vol. I. p. 188, 189.

Now a Being whose "whole character is love," can have no vestige of malice; and "uncompounded good-will" necessarily excludes every kind and degree of ill-will, under all circumstances whatsoever. Then there is no more hatred or ill-will in the attribute of *justice*, than there is in *benevolence.* Of course, unless we are disposed to maintain that the Divine character is a compound of good and evil principles, we must conclude that his disposition is a perfect unity of uncompounded love, always consistent with itself, and perfectly harmonious in all its energies and modifications.

We are sorry to find so respectable an author as Dr. *Chalmers* apparently aiming to involve this important conclusion in some doubt and uncertainty. In his "Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation," he says, "Were a verbal communication to come to us

from a person at a distance, there are two ways in which we might try to satisfy ourselves, that this was a true communication, and that there was no imposition in the affair. We might either sit in examination upon the substance of the message; and then from what we knew of the person from whom it professed to come, judge whether it was probable that such a message would be sent by him; or we may sit in examination upon the credibility of the messengers.

"It is evident, that in carrying on the first examination, we might be subject to very great uncertainty. The professed author of the communication in question may live at such a distance from us, that we may never have it in our power to verify his message by any personal conversation with him. We may be so far ignorant of his character and designs, as to be unqualified to judge of the kind of communication that should proceed from him.

"Now, this consideration applies in all its parts to a message from God. We may sit in judgment upon the subject of the message; or we may sit in judgment upon the credibility of its bearers. The substance of the message is neither more nor less, than that particular scheme of the divine economy which is revealed to us in the New Testament; and the point of inquiry is, whether this scheme be consistent with that knowledge of God and his attributes which we are previously in possession of.

"It appears to many, that no effectual argument can

be founded upon this consideration, because they do not count themselves enough acquainted with the *designs* or *character* of the Being from whom the message professes to have come. (p. 10, 11, 12.) We are not competent to judge of the conduct of the Almighty in given circumstances. It is not for man to assume what is right, or proper, or natural for the Almighty to do. (p. 159.) Our whole attention is directed to the validity of the record; and the moment that this validity is established, we hold it incumbent upon us to submit our minds to the entire and unmodified impression of the testimony contained in it. (p. 160.) We hold the total insufficiency of natural religion to pronounce upon the intrinsic merits of any revelation. We profess ourselves to be too little acquainted with the CHARACTER of God; and that in this little corner of his works, we see not far enough to offer any decision on the merits of a Government, which embraces worlds, and reaches eternity." (p. 155, 156.)

In addition to the above statements, Dr. Chalmers says again, "We look upon the mind of an Atheist, as in a better state of preparation for the proofs of Christianity than the mind of a Deist. He [the Atheist] has no God of nature to confront with that real though invisible power which lay at the bottom of those astonishing miracles, on which history has stamped her most authentic characters. Though the power which presided there should be an ARBITRARY, an UNJUST, or a MALIGNANT being, all this may startle a Deist, but it will

not prevent a consistent Atheist from acquiescing in any legitimate inference, to which the miracles of the Gospel, viewed in the simple light of historical facts, may chance to carry him. (p. 168, 171.) If there be nothing then, in the ordinary phenomena of nature, to infer a God, do these extraordinary phenomena supply him with no argument? Does a voice from heaven make no impression upon him? (p. 172.) Instead of learning the designs and character of the Almighty from his own mouth, we sit in judgment upon them; and make our conjecture of what they should be, take the precedency of his revelation of what they are." (p. 180.)

The learned author frequently returns to this theme in the course of his work on the evidence and authority of the Christian Revelation, and manifests considerable solicitude to make the impression, that we cannot argue from the character of the Christian Revelation, that it came from God, because we know not what the character of God is; and therefore cannot know what kind of a revelation should come from him. On this subject the following remarks may not be out of place.

1. If we are so unacquainted with the character of God, that we are not to 'sit in judgment' on any communication that professes to come from him, then we have no authority to argue from the character of the religion established by Mahomet, that it did not come from God. Nay, had his system been so much worse than it is, as to teach that God is 'arbitrary, unjust and malignant,' we should still be bound to receive and sub-

mit to it, provided the testimony of its 'messengers' were credible, in testifying to miraculous facts in its support. Would not this be surrendering ourselves to an arbitrary, unjust and malignant government? Could any revelation impose a *moral obligation* on any being to be subject to such a government? If it would, then revealed religion can sanctify tyranny, and transform wrong into right, and right into wrong.

2. However credible the messengers may be, they can only testify that they saw certain miracles, and that the performer of the miracles taught them certain doctrines; but this will not prove the doctrines to be true; for if we know nothing of the character of him who reveals them, what evidence can we have that he is not a *deceiver*, who intends to impose falsehoods upon us? We say the marks of honesty are so manifest in the conduct of the bearers of the message, that we cannot doubt their veracity. And has the Author of the message given no marks of honesty upon his conduct, by which we can have equal evidence of *his* veracity? If he has *not*, then he may have deceived the apostles, and through them, deceived all mankind: if he *has* given such marks, then it is not true that he has left us in entire ignorance of his character. We know our Creator is trust-worthy, not merely because he *says* it, but because he has *proved it*, by action, as every other being proves the reality of his character.

3. Suppose mankind had been compelled by evidence which they could not resist, to believe in a revelation

informing them that their Maker is essentially an evil and malignant being, would such a revelation be a *blessing* to the world? Would it promote the *happiness*, or the *misery*, of the human race? Even if it were intended to envelope the whole intelligent creation in gloom, as the prelude to universal despair, philosophy, it seems, will nevertheless require us to receive it with "the hardihood of unfeeling intelligence."

4. If a revelation had been given encouraging every vice and prohibiting every virtue, under the severest penalties, it is supposed we ought to receive and to act upon it, provided only that its historical documents were credible. If we knew nothing concerning our Creator, we could not determine whether he would not be as likely to give this kind of a revelation as any other. Do we look with horror upon such a supposition? It is exactly because of the strong evidence which our Maker has established in nature, and in our moral faculties, of the purity and benevolence of his disposition.

5. Though it be granted, that we cannot comprehend all the operations of "a government which embraces worlds, and reaches eternity," yet this arises from the vast extent of the system, and not from our ignorance of the 'character and designs' of our Creator. This character is perfect loveliness, and his design is to prevent evil and to promote good to all eternity, so far as it is possible for the one to be prevented, and the other promoted. To deny this, is to say that

God does not intend to do what he enjoins on all his children,—that is, to do all the good he can. We may be astonished at the vastness and seeming mystery of his plan of operating; but that his *design*, is to do the greatest possible good, is a conclusion which follows from the perfection of moral character, as evidently as light flows from the sun.

But these arguments must be sustained by authority. The first we shall produce is that of Dr. Chalmers himself. On page 183 of the work before mentioned, speaking of the earliest Christians, he says, "There was nothing in their antecedent theology which they could have any respect for: nothing which they could confront, or bring into competition with the doctrines of the New Testament. In those days, the truth as it is in Jesus came to the mind of its disciples, recommended by its novelty, by its grandeur, by the power and recency of its evidences, and above all by its vast and evident superiority over the fooleries of a degrading Paganism. It does not occur to us, that men in these circumstances would ever think of sitting in judgment over the mysteries of that sublime faith which had charmed them into an abandonment of their earlier religion. It rather strikes us, that they would receive them passively; and that the restless tendency of the human mind to speculation, would for a time find ample enjoyment in the RICH and splendid discoveries, which broke like a flood of light upon the world."

Now we may be permitted to ask,—did not those

early disciples so far 'sit in judgment' as to decide that their 'sublime faith' was more worthy of God than 'the fooleries of a degrading Paganism?' Had they been entirely ignorant of the divine character when 'that sublime faith' was first revealed to them, it would have been utterly impossible for them to know which was more likely to come from God, Paganism or Christianity. If they were convinced of the truth and divinity of the Christian revelation, on account of 'the rich and splendid discoveries which broke like a flood of light upon the world,' it was because they were well enough acquainted with God, to know that 'rich and splendid things' would come from him, rather than such as would be 'foolish and degrading.' They knew that 'a flood of light' would proceed from him, and not the darkness of a mind that is 'arbitrary, unjust and malignant.'

Our second authority is Dr. Dwight: he says, (Vol. I. p. 212,) "DISTRUST is an entire separation of an intelligent being from his Maker. We cannot possibly coincide voluntarily with the designs of a being, unless we confide in his truth and benevolence, and of course in the rectitude of those designs. No virtuous obedience can be yielded to laws, of whose rectitude we are not satisfied; no *complacency* exercised towards a character, in which we do not confide; no gratitude rendered for benefits, conferred by a suspected benefactor; no reliance placed on promises, made by a being of doubted veracity; and no praise-worthy efforts

made to promote designs, regarded as suspicious and unworthy. Without confidence, the soul is separated of course, from its Creator. How, then, can God be pleased with this character, or accept him in whom it exists?"

From this quotation it follows that unless creatures, when a revelation is given them from God, know enough of his character to be convinced of his "truth and benevolence," and the "rectitude of his designs," they cannot possibly so "confide" in him as to receive the revelation from his hands; and that there could be no "obedience" to such a revelation, nor any "complacency" or "gratitude" for the bestowment of it, but upon a conviction of the goodness and rectitude of Him from whom the revelation comes.

The evidence of divine goodness is indeed greatly enlarged by the discoveries of revelation; but a previous knowledge of this subject, in some degree, is necessary to furnish created minds with the capacity to receive a revelation from God, and to appreciate its evidences; as much so as first principles are necessary as a foundation for all conclusive reasoning in every other branch of human knowledge.

The great mind of Dr. Chalmers was hampered in its mental progress, by a preconceived system of theology, which produced unfair reasoning, and sometimes brought darkness and error into his conclusions. After exhibiting a variety of luminous arguments in proof of the existence and skill of a Supreme Being, he furnishes

nothing for his readers but this melancholy conclusion: "In the workmanship of nature we behold an infinity of special adaptations to special objects, each of which bespeaks a sovereign mind that plans and purposes—yet there may the deepest obscurity hang over the question, what is the plan or purpose of this workmanship on the whole? What is true of an individual, is true of a species or of a universe. Throughout, and in its separate parts, it may be pregnant with the notices of a Divinity—yet in reference both to its creation and its government, to the principle in which it originated and the consummation in which it issues, there may be an overhanging mystery—and man, all clear and confident on the question that God is, may abide notwithstanding in deepest ignorance of His purposes and His ways." Natural Theology, Vol. I. p. 278.

This seems to imply, that although wonderful wisdom has been employed in framing a universe, and in fashioning the body and soul of man, yet it is altogether uncertain whether the ultimate end of the system will accomplish a wise and benevolent purpose or not. It cannot be successfully denied, that the ultimate end of a wise plan, contains equal wisdom with any of the foregoing parts; for it was for the sake of the end, that the parts were contrived at all. To suppose Almighty God to employ so much exact intelligence in the formation of man, as to constrain every thinking man to wonder at himself, and yet to consider it doubtful whether a wise and good end were intended, "on the

whole," appears to me to be unspeakably reproachful to our Creator. If a human agent should be at great pains, and should employ vast mechanical skill, in finishing a complicated machine, that was intended for nothing, and could accomplish nothing, his skill in the contrivance would only prove the greatness of his folly, in employing his faculties for no valuable end. A Being who is truly wise, carries forward the whole of his wisdom into the ultimatum of his operations; and the same is true of a Being who is really benevolent. The supposition that a benevolent disposition will prepare a creature for happiness, and furnish the necessary means, without intending the creature's happiness as the ultimate end of the contrivance, is a very manifest contradiction; and could never be seriously entertained by the human mind, if as much attention were devoted to the perfection and immutability of moral principles, as their importance deserves.

"There may," says Dr. Chalmers, "the deepest obscurity hang over the question, what is the plan or purpose of this workmanship on the whole?" This may be true, if we mean only that the circumstances and the details are unknown to us; but the general "purpose," or end aimed at by the Author, will undoubtedly be the same which presided over the construction of the means. Why else were the means contrived at all? Over this question there hangs no "obscurity;" for every proof we have of our Creator's wisdom and kindness in the contrivance, is a proof equally strong

of his wisdom and kindness in the *object* of that contrivance; otherwise we charge him with employing great acuteness and skill for nothing, or for the accomplishing of an end which will be worse than nothing: the former supposition contains a complete definition of *folly*, and the latter of *malevolence*. The employment of a high degree of skill, in the accomplishment of a frivolous end, is greater folly than an employment of little skill for such a purpose; and a system of means which has the *appearance* of benevolence, when a contrary end is intended by its Author, seems manifestly to imply the deceitfulness of an evil and malignant disposition.

I conclude, therefore, that if we have no evidence of the wisdom and goodness of God's ultimate purposes towards his intelligent creation, we have no evidence of his wisdom and goodness in any of the arrangements and contrivances of nature. The presumptuous criminality of mankind evidently requires a corresponding course of measures, on the part of the Supreme Ruler; and the seeming severity of those measures is accounted for by the malignant energy of the evil which they are intended to counteract and to subdue. It is unjust and unreasonable to entertain suspicions against the Almighty, on account of his treatment of our fallen race; for the malicious ungodliness of the world is utterly inexcusable, and deserves the righteous indignation of heaven, and the just vengeance of heaven's insulted Sovereign.

"When looking to an individual man," says Dr. Chalmers, "we cannot but recognize the conceptions of an architect, in the teeth, and the eyes, and the hands, and all the parts of manifest subserviency which belong to him—yet remain unable to solve the enigma of his being, or to fathom the general conception of the Divinity in thus ushering a creature to existence, that he may live in restless vanity, and die in despair." (*Ibid.*)

As to man's living "in restless vanity," this providential arrangement is manifestly intended as a salutary check upon the corruption of the human soul. It is a course of parental chastisement for man's stupid obstinacy, in refusing to give truth and conscience a hearing, and in spending his life in successive acts of irrational and diabolical wickedness. Those who repent of their sins, and submit to the holy and just demands of their Creator, far from "dying in despair," prove the truth of God's word, that "the righteous hath hope in his death," and realize, in substance, the views and feelings of the dying apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.)

It may be fairly presumed, that no son or daughter of Adam ever "died in despair," except by the weight of unrepented guilt, or from the influence of some de-

lusive doctrine, which distorted the character of the Supreme Being. When "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness," in consequence of his having despised Divine goodness to the last, shall his despair embarrass our attempts "to fathom the general conceptions of the Divinity," in regard to the ultimate purposes of its moral government?

If we believed the Almighty to be the author of the despairing man's heedless inconsideration;—the contriver and producer of his crimes and his misery;—this would truly conduct us to "an overhanging mystery;" but false theology would be the cause of it, and not any legitimate evidence of the Divinity, derived either from nature or from revelation.

The wickedness of mankind on this globe is not the result of necessity, but is a voluntary and unnecessitated course of irrational stupidity, hard-hearted malevolence, and insulting effrontery to God and to all upright society. The excuses of sinners are founded in error and falsehood; and this falsehood has been spread through the world, to the soothing of many a guilty conscience, by erroneous methods of teaching the Christian religion.

The darkness is all contained in man's free and unnecessitated abominations; and it is utterly unjust to assume that the deep foundation of all this evil was laid in the predestinated counsels of heaven; or in other words, that sin and its consequences are produced and perpetuated by the decree and irresistible agency of

ficient evidence, or demand our obedience, without making it our greatest interest to obey. The sin of unbelief consists in its uncandid disregard of evidence; and the turpitude of rebellion is measured by the amount of its hostility to pure goodness and righteousness. It is too often assumed, that as the Almighty is a *great* Being, he demands of us to take his word, and to obey his mandates, upon the sole authority of his *sovereign greatness.* This supposes that *right* has its origin in *power*, and that truth is to be known, and an obligation of credence imposed, by the *ipse dixit* of absolute majesty. This secret assumption has been fondly adopted, as a basis for the doctrine of eternal election and reprobation; and it has carried darkness and confusion through the systems of theology for more than three hundred years. If Arminians admit the principle, consistency will require them to adopt all its legitimate results; if they reject it, they will find themselves conducted to the conclusion, that our Creator never demanded faith in, and obedience to, any revelation given from him to his creatures, without having previously given them sufficient evidence of the veracity and rectitude of his eternal character. He proved to them the reality of his goodness and righteousness, by a course of benevolent action, before he made any revealed injunction or demand upon them, either to credit his testimony, or to submit to his authority.

SECTION IV.

None of God's instructions fail to produce their effect, except by our inattention and neglect.

In all the Divine communications, man is treated and dealt with as a voluntary agent. Truth is not conveyed irresistibly, excepting such first principles as are necessary to put the understanding and the will into action. After this, the soul is left free, either to hear or to turn away from its Maker's instructions. The full attention of the mind ought in candour to be given to the teachings of God, through whatever medium they may approach us. But alas! Adam's fallen and wicked race "turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." They scorn the wisdom of the eternal, and choose to walk in their own counsel.

If "the heavens declare the glory of God," if a revelation was originally given, and delivered by tradition to the first generations of mankind, and if the Holy Spirit was also striving with them, how did it happen that they wandered into such base idolatry and wickedness? It was because "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge:—when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Can any modern theologian give a

more reasonable and satisfactory account of the matter than this?

Shall we say the wandering of the Heathens proves the *inadequacy* of the means used for their instruction and salvation? Then will not the same conclusion hold in regard to the Jews, who wandered so far from Moses and the prophets, that when they made a proselyte he was made "a child of hell," instead of being converted and reformed? And besides, what heathen nation ever became more abandoned than was the church, at the time of the *crusades*, the *image worship*, and the *Inquisition?* Did heathens ever do worse? Were they ever sunk into deeper ignorance, or deeper vice? Never. Then if their ignorance and degradation furnished a demonstration that the light which heaven afforded them was inadequate, the corruption of the church equally proved that the *Bible* was insufficient. We need not wonder that the Bible does not lead those into virtue and happiness who never "search the Scriptures;" nor that spiritual influence does not convert those who "do always resist the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did;" and as little cause have we to be surprised that the works of nature do not convey a saving knowledge of God to those who regard not the work of the Lord, and do not *consider* the operation of his hands.

God had reserved unto himself seven thousand men in Israel, even during the gloomy and idolatrous days of Ahab, that loved and obeyed him; and there has probably never been a period of the world in which

any nation was so far gone, either during the reign of Pagan idolatry or through the dark ages of the church, that no individuals among them acknowledged God, and followed the guidance of his Holy Spirit. Some appear to think it impossible that there should be any truly virtuous men amongst the heathens, because, as they suppose, God has not given them a sufficiency of light to lead a single soul of them in the way of salvation. But is it at all probable, that God would keep millions of mankind on the stage of human action, from age to age, who are not in a state of moral probation and responsibility? If so, for what purpose do they exist? Will any one say those creatures can be in a state of trial, who have not light enough to show them the right and the wrong, or to enable them to avoid the one and to pursue the other? If it be said the heathens have light enough to leave them without excuse, but not to save them, what can be the import of such a proposition? If they have not light enough to save them, they are not guilty of the crime of rejecting salvation. Then for what are they culpable? For not living so virtuously as the light of nature taught them to live? They had power to live thus virtuously, or they had not; if they *had not*, to what purpose was the light given, and how did it leave them without excuse? if they *had*, then of course they might be saved, by doing all that was required in order to their salvation. Shall we go to the heathens, and tell them that all their fathers will be punished in a lake of

everlasting fire, for not following the directions of a Saviour of whom they never heard? Will these sad tidings dispose them to give a ready hearing to the lessons of the Christian religion?

Such a doctrine as this we cannot receive; and it may now be proper to sustain the opposite views, by the authority of two distinguished theological writers. The first is the Rev. *Richard Watson*, who says, "The case of HEATHEN NATIONS has sometimes been referred to by Calvinists, as presenting equal difficulties to those urged against their scheme of election and reprobation. But the cases are not at all parallel, nor can they be made so, unless it could be proved that Heathens, *as such*, are inevitably excluded from the kingdom of heaven; which is not, as some of them seem to suppose, a conceded point. Those, indeed, if there be any such, who, believing in the universal redemption of mankind, should allow this, would be most inconsistent with themselves, and give up many of those principles on which they successfully contend against the doctrine of absolute reprobation. The dispensation of religion under which all those nations are to whom the gospel has never been sent, continues to be the *patriarchal* dispensation. That men were saved under that in former times, we know. We indeed know that some virtuous Heathens have been found in all ages; and some earnest and anxious inquirers after truth, dissatisfied with the notions prevalent in their own countries respectively; and what these few were, the rest might have been likewise.

If all knowledge of right and wrong, and all gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, have passed away from the Heathen, through the fault of their ancestors, and without the present race having been parties to this wilful abandonment of truth, then they would appear no longer to be accountable creatures, being neither under *law* nor under *grace;* but, as we find it a doctrine of Scripture that all men are responsible to God, and that the 'whole world' will be judged at the last day, we are bound to admit the accountability of all, and with that, the remains of law and the existence of a merciful government towards the Heathen on the part of God." (Institutes, pp. 541, 542.)

Our next authority is *Dr. Dwight.* He says, "A child enters the world in *China;* and unites, as a thing of course, with his sottish countrymen in the stupid worship of the idol *Fo.* Another prostrates himself before the *Lama,* in consequence of having received his being in *Thibet,* and of seeing the *Lama* worshipped by all around him. A third, who begins his existence in *Turkey,* is carried early to the mosque; and habituated to repeat the prayers, and sentences, of the *Koran,* as the means of eternal life. The *Hindoo* grows into a religious veneration for the cow; and perhaps never doubts, that, if he adds to this a solemn devotion to *Juggernaut,* the *Gooroos,* and the *Dewtahs,* and performs carefully his ablutions in the *Ganges,* he shall wash away all his sins, and obtain, by the favour of *Brahma,* a seat among the blessed." The Doctor proceeds further with the

enumeration, and says at the close, "I wish it to be distinctly understood, and carefully remembered, that in the moral conduct of all these individuals no physical necessity operates. Every one of them is absolutely a free agent; as free as any created agent *can* be. Whatever he does, is the result of choice, absolutely unconstrained. Let me add, that not one of them is placed in a situation, in which, if he learns, and performs his duty to the utmost of his ability, he will fail of being finally accepted." (Theology, pp. 267, 268.)

Now did not Dr. Dwight intend to be understood, that no Heathen ever lived who had not within his reach the means of eternal salvation? Did he not mean to say, that a Heathen is as free an agent as a Christian, and that no demand is made for his agency to act, when it has nothing to act upon? If the Gentile will be "finally accepted," in consequence of learning and performing his duty, according to the means and ability which he possesses, then he is truly in a state of probation, and "the Judge of all the earth will do right." Let this "be distinctly understood, and carefully remembered," that no unworthy thoughts of God may be entertained by any human soul.

Will it be said, that Heathens have not the privilege of other redeemed sinners, to be "accepted" upon the gospel plan, and that Dr. Dwight only meant that if they would present a spotless obedience to God, on the original ground of the law of innocence, they should be "finally accepted?" If so, his doctrine evidently was,

that "every one of them is absolutely a free agent; as free [to keep the law of innocence] as any created agent *can* be." [And, consequently, possessing an equal agency to do it, with Adam before the fall.] If the Heathens could be "finally accepted" in this way, they would be saved without a Saviour, and without any act of clemency, or justifying mercy, on the part of God. Dr. Dwight did not believe this doctrine; and unless we allow him to have meant that all men have salvation within their reach, upon the evangelical plan of redemption, do we not appear to charge him with a solemn shuffling?—with seriously and impressively inviting his readers to have it "*distinctly understood*, and *carefully remembered*"—that "every one of them [the Heathens] might be 'finally accepted,' provided they would obey the law of innocence, as Adam was required to do in Paradise! This would imply—"Let it be carefully remembered," that the doctrine of inevitable reprobation is here artfully *concealed* under the *appearance* of sentimental liberality. The worthy author whom we have quoted, had too much candour and dignity of Christian principle, to be capable of such duplicity as this; and we are glad to have his authority in support of a doctrine so worthy of God, as that no Mahometan, Jew, or Pagan, will ever be condemned in the future world, but for rejecting a salvation which he had it in his power to accept.

But if Heathens may be saved, notwithstanding they live and die without any knowledge of the Lord Jesus

Christ, are they not saved without a Saviour? Not at all: the whole of their salvation comes through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and in eternity they shall understand the greatness of their obligation. Many of us believe that all who die in infancy are saved; but it does not therefore follow that they are saved without a Saviour, because they know him not until after their departure to the eternal world; and equally futile is such a conclusion in regard to Heathens.

We conclude, upon the whole, that the Bible is not honoured, but degraded, by being set up as an antagonist against the light of nature. The latter is sometimes hastily regarded as furnishing a kind of carnal knowledge, which has no spirituality in it; but will God separate his Spirit from his works, any more than from his word? "The Spirit of God moved upon" nature when it was brought into order; and he is equally able to move upon the human soul in conjunction with the light which his own works convey. He is not the author of a carnal knowledge, nor of a carnal creation; nor will any one pretend that the works of nature are the productions of some other God.

The Psalmist says, "I *meditate* on all thy works; I *muse* on the work of thy hands. I *consider* the heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained." (Psalm cxliii. 5 and viii. 3.) Elihu says, "God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend. For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; like-

wise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength.—Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and *consider* the wondrous *works of God.*" (Job xxxvii. 5, 6—14.) Solomon also says, "*Consider* the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" (Eccl. vii. 13.) The Almighty says, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. *Lift up your eyes on high*, and *behold* who hath *created* these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth." And to his rebellious people he saith, "Wo unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!—But they *regard not* the work of the Lord, neither *consider* the operation of his hands." (Isa. xl. 26 and v. 11, 12.) The inhabitants of heaven, as we are informed in the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse, shout with exultation and joy, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Thus we learn that good men through earth and heaven have been in the habit of kindling their devotion at the stars; while the wicked and abandoned were involved in their vicious courses, because they would not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hands. And shall we say, after all this, that the voice of God in his creation is a defective voice, calculated to produce only a philo-

sophical and carnal religion? It is obviously the duty of every Christian, while he carefully follows the light of the Holy Spirit, to study the works of God with the same devotional reverence which he is to exercise in reading the Holy Scriptures. These, heaven benign in vital union binds; and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Too much attention to the works of nature, with a view to form a religious system from that source exclusively, is apt to give rise to a vain philosophy, and to terminate in infidelity; an adherence to the Bible, to the disparagement of the Creation, produces an authoritative bigotry, and a disposition to demand the surrender of man's rational faculties; while a pretence of being led by the Holy Spirit in every thing, in a way of infallible inspiration, is commonly observed to generate a spirit of enthusiasm, which undervalues alike both reason and revelation. Therefore the course of true wisdom and piety, is to use the good gifts of our Heavenly Father in harmony, and consistently to avail ourselves of their joint operation, in conducting us in the way of everlasting happiness.

SECTION V.

An Answer to an Objection of a late author.

A LATE author (Rev. Mr. Nelson) has published a valuable book entitled "The Cause and Cure of Infidelity," in which he urges the common argument in favour of the Bible, that Reason is insufficient, and has led the world astray. "Those ancient Greeks," he says, "had great statesmen, orators, and poets. Succeeding ages have gazed at them: they believe that to stand that only son, that promising boy, on the altar, and whip him until his entrails could be seen through the quivering flesh, would please Diana. Are you admiring the wealth, or the polish of the Carthaginians? They believe *sincerely*, (so sincerely that they would perform it,) that it would please God if one or two hundred of their children at a time were cast into that red-hot metallic statue. Just such things were believed by Romans, Medes, Elamites, and all people where that singular old book did not circulate. Reader, if you believe that reason did always teach to avoid these cruel enormities where the Bible was found, but never did happen to instruct better where that page was not, then we have no farther argument with you at the present." (p. 101.)

Here it is supposed that where the Bible is not, "reason teaches" and "instructs" mankind, and always

leads them wrong; and that there is no way for them to find the truth, but to forsake reason and follow the Bible. For if they lead to essentially opposite results, they can never co-operate. How does a man follow the teachings of reason, but by a candid exercise of his thinking faculties, in judging according to the evidence presented to his understanding? When "the heavens declare the glory of God," does not a man follow reason, by giving a candid attention to the declaration? It is God that furnishes the instruction, and for us to devote a candid attention to it, is to follow our reason, unless it can be made appear that to regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hand, is an unreasonable exercise of our faculties. Will such an attention to the voice of God in nature, always, and of necessity, lead the minds of men into delusion? It is presumed there are few who will venture to affirm this. It may be said, perhaps, that men go astray because they are not attentive and candid in surveying God's visible creation. Then they do not follow the teachings of reason, but the dictates of prejudice and passion; for it is presumed no one will undertake to show that when a man is inattentive and uncandid, he thereby evinces a *reasonable* exercise of his understanding.

Again: when men attentively and candidly search the Scriptures, to ascertain what are the instructions of God in his word, are they not then following their reason, as much as they are when in the same way

they meditate upon all his works? Mr. Nelson's whole book is intended to furnish arguments with which to convince men that they should believe the Bible. Does he not wish them to give these arguments a fair examination? But this would be to follow reason, unless it be said that such an attention to argument is an unreasonable thing. Hence it is obvious, that when men consider the evidence and import of the Bible, they follow reason as their guide, as much as they do in properly studying the visible works of God. In neither case is reason the *source* of evidence or instruction, but only the recipient; and in both cases the same God is the teacher, who will never contradict himself, or teach delusion through one medium of communication any more than through the other.

Reason, it may be said, is too *weak* to learn any thing of God in the works of creation. But it is the same weak reason that is called upon to receive truth from the Bible. The latter, it is admitted, furnishes *more* instruction than the former: but is reason too *weak* to learn a *small* lesson, and at the same time *strong* enough to master a *greater* one? The only reply that can be given to this, is, that the instructions of God in nature are not so *intelligible* as in revelation. They are sufficiently intelligible to lead the attentive and candid mind into the truth; otherwise it will follow, either that in the works of creation God did not design to communicate truth to man concerning himself, or that he could not make himself understood by those whose mental facul-

ties were formed by him for the purpose of receiving his instructions.

But all theory, we shall be told, must surrender to facts. "Romans, Medes, Elamites, and all people where that singular old book did not circulate, believe sincerely that it would please God if one or two hundred of their children at a time, were cast into that red-hot metallic statue."

Without stopping at present to demand proof that "all people where that singular old book did not circulate," actually embraced these delusive enormities, we would be glad to have an answer to the following questions: First, did the voice of God in nature ever *teach* people that it would please him "if one or two hundred of their children at a time were cast into that red-hot metallic statue?" Secondly, if it did not, were any people ever led into such a barbarous delusion by attentively and candidly surveying the works of nature, to the best of their ability? Thirdly, would it not be reasonable for people every where so to attend to the instructions of God in his works, as to avoid such evil practices? If it would, it then appears that men have been led into such practices, not by following their reason, but by departing from its dictates. *As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.* (Rom. i. 28.)

If such facts prove the inadequacy of human reason, or the deficiency of the instructions of God in nature, similar facts will equally prove the deficiency of the

Bible. When heretics were burnt by scores and hundreds at the stake, the rulers of the church called it "an act of faith," and said they did God service, and were led into this barbarous conduct by the instructions of the Bible. This is as easily proved, as it is that any heathen under heaven was ever led into the practice of like barbarities by an attentive and candid examination of the teachings of God in nature:—that is, by following his reason. Men are led into those enormities by following the dictates of pride, passion, superstition and malignity, whether they live in Christian or in Heathen lands.

But, to come to Protestant Christendom: have not men been telling us for more than two hundred years, that the Bible has taught them to believe that God from all eternity elected a few of mankind to salvation, and reprobated all the rest to damnation, in such a way as to make the number of each absolutely definite, and their fate eternally unalterable? Do they not profess to have been taught by the Bible, that there are elect and reprobate angels, and elect and reprobate infants? Now if men believe there are infants in hell not a span long, who were ordained to endless misery from everlasting, what character of God is conceived by any Heathen, which is more directly calculated than is this doctrine, to support the inference "That it would please God if one or two hundred of their children at a time were cast into that red-hot metallic statue?" The thing which we contend for is, that neither the Bible

nor the Creation exhibits such a gloomy character of God; and therefore that neither of them gives countenance to the conclusion, that barbarous practices will be pleasing in his sight. Such practices are appealed to as facts which show the weakness of human reason; but they only evince the stupidity of wilful ignorance, and the inexcusable indulgence of human passion and malignity.

We are told, however, that Heathens are "*sincere*" in their belief, that God is pleased with such cruel practices. And were not both the priests and people in Christendom "*sincere*" in their belief that God was pleased when he saw heretics burnt at the stake? Was not Saul of Tarsus *sincere* when he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples? He says "I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." But does it therefore follow, that he was taught to be a persecutor by the Scriptures of the Old Testament? As little does it follow, that Heathens are taught to burn their children in the fire, by the voice of God in nature, because they may be *sincere* in their delusions.

Are we left to infer, that all Heathens, however *sincere* some of them may be, are indiscriminately sent into hell? What! do they regularly follow their reason, and are they led into delusion by the best possible use of their faculties, and then eternally punished because they had not other faculties, or did not possess higher means of information! Saul of Tarsus obtained

mercy, because he did it ignorantly in unbelief. Why may not sincere Heathens obtain mercy upon the same footing? Saul had no new Bible given to put him into a state of probation. But God, it may be said, used special means to enlighten his mind, because he saw that he was sincere. And cannot the same God use special means to enlighten Heathens, so far as may be necessary to their salvation, whenever he sees them truly and perseveringly sincere? If he *can* but *will* not, it is because free wrath, or a reprobating disposition, is an essential part of his character; and if he *would* but *cannot* save the Heathens while there are no Bibles among them, it follows that he is dependent on the agency of our missionaries, for his *ability* to save the souls of sincere people.

Good men are greatly mistaken, when they suppose infidelity will be refuted by our undervaluing the works of God. It is the same human reason that operates, whether it be used in examining the works or the written word of God; and if reason be set aside, to what purpose is a Bible given? As well might a revelation be given to the irrational animals, as to creatures whose reason necessarily leads them astray. When God communicates his truth to us, whether in nature or revelation, our belief of his testimony is a *reasonable faith*, and obedience to his precepts *is our reasonable service.*

For what is the variety of convincing evidence brought forward by Mr. Nelson, but to show us that reason is sufficient to prove that the Bible is true?

Then why should we inconsistently weaken the force of reason, by attempting to show its imbecility, its uncertainty, its darkness, and its leading thousands and millions into inevitable delusion? If it be thus weak, imbecile, uncertain, dark and delusive, how can it be depended on to prove the truth of Christianity? If reason be a false guide, let us no longer appeal to its dictates for the refutation of infidelity.

That our understanding is weak, and liable to run into delusions, is as true when we use it in searching the scriptures, as when we attend to the voice of God in nature; and a due sense of this weakness, and a corresponding modesty in our conclusions, is essential to the right exercise of our reason, whether it be applied to the works of our Creator, or to his written revelation. We shall enter more fully into the argument, in regard to Heathen salvation, in a subsequent part of this treatise.

SECTION VI.

The greatness of God must be taken into view, in the illustration of his goodness.

The design of introducing God's *greatness*, in the investigation of his *goodness*, is to excite the modest consideration, that the vastness of his plans, and the extent of his superintendency, may require a course of

measures which, though perfectly wise and just, may not appear so to limited creatures in one corner of his Creation, who cannot take an adequate survey of the whole; therefore particular events which seem to us unwise or cruel, in a system so extensive, ought to have no weight against the amount of positive evidence we have of our Creator's rectitude and benevolence. In this view, therefore, the subject of the present section will be seen to be no improper digression from the theme before us.

In viewing the vast and infinite Majesty of the Godhead, our attention is first called to his *eternity* and *immensity.* It is said *the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain him;* and he calls himself *The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.* Here we approach a vast ocean; for eternity is a great deep which is unfathomable by our powers of conception.

"The schoolmen," says Dr. Reid, "made eternity to be a *nunc stans*, that is, a moment of time that stands still. This was to put a spoke into the wheel of time, and might give satisfaction to those who are to be satisfied by words without meaning. But I can as easily believe a circle to be a square, as time to stand still." (Essay on Duration.)

Men in modern ages also, from the difficulty of comprehending an eternal progression, have adopted the "*nunc stans*" of the schoolmen, and have attempted to illustrate the matter by speaking of God's *still* eternity. They say infinite duration is an eternal *now*, in which

there is no *succession;* that it is a single immoveable point;—that is, "a moment of time that stands still." And yet this unsuccessive moment is so long, that it comprehends the entire duration of the world, from the first day of Adam's life, down to the general conflagration!

"On this subject of the eternal duration of the Divine Being," says the Rev. Richard Watson, "many have held a metaphysical refinement. The eternal existence of God, it is said, is not to be considered as *successive;* with him eternity is *nunc stans*, a permanent *now*, incapable of the relations of past, present, and future. Such, certainly, is not the view given us in the Scriptures. Filling duration with his eternity, is a phrase without any meaning: for how can any man conceive a *permanent instant*, which co-exists with a perpetually *flowing* duration? One might as well apprehend a mathematical point co-extended with a line, a surface, and all dimensions. We can conceive no otherwise of duration, than *continuance* of being;—of this every man's consciousness will assure him, that we can form no idea of duration except in this *successive* manner. But we are told, that the eternity of God is a fixed eternal *now*, from which all ideas of succession, of past and future, are to be excluded; and we are called upon to conceive of eternal duration, to the exclusion of the idea of that *flow* under which we conceive of time. Duration, as applied to God, is no more than an extension of the idea as applied to ourselves;

and to exhort us to conceive of it as something essentially different, is to require us to conceive what is inconceivable. It is to demand of us to think without ideas." (Institutes, p. 181.)

Mr. Watson continues the argument at some length, and concludes: "Minutes and moments may be artificial, adopted to aid our conceptions; but conceptions of what? Not of any thing standing still, but of something going on. If the duration of the Divine Being admits not of past, present, and future, one of these two consequences must follow,—that no such attribute as that of eternity belongs to Him,—or that there is no power in the human mind to conceive of it. In either case the Scriptures are greatly impugned; for "He who *was*, and *is*, and *is to come*," is a revelation of the eternity of God, which is then in no sense true." (p. 182.)

To say eternity is a "*nunc stans*" without *advancement*, is like saying immensity is a *point*, without *extension*. It is true of time, as it is of space, that the *whole* cannot be measured; and yet the parts every where are equally and alike subject to measurement. As the parts of space beyond the bounds of the universe, though they have not been measured, are yet in their own nature as susceptible of it as the parts within its bounds; so the parts of duration, at any point before the world was made, were in their own nature as susceptible of measurement, as time present or future.

It is true of space, that it necessarily and eternally stands still, and it is impossible for it to move; it is ex-

actly as true of time, that it necessarily advances, and it is impossible for it to stand still. As well might we be called upon to believe in *moveable space*, as in *unsuccessive duration*. As well might it be affirmed, that immensity has no extension, as that eternity is without advancement, or is something different from a continuance of time. It is true that the progress of time without beginning, is inconceivable; but for it to have a beginning is not only inconceivable, but impossible. The following is an exact parallel: For space to extend without boundaries, is inconceivable; for it to have boundaries, is impossible. It only remains, then, for us to choose whether we will receive that for a truth, which is *inconceivable;* or that which is *impossible*. To say God *created* successive duration, is like saying he *created* measurable expansion: which implies, that in his eternity there was *no time*, and in his immensity there was *no space!*

If successive duration belong not to the Almighty, if with him there be no *future*, how can he have the happiness of anticipation and *prospect?* If past, present, and to come, belong not to his duration, it will follow, that for him to foretell what he will do, and actually to perform it, are the same thing, and done at the same time. It will follow, that his act in creating the world, was not *prior* to his act in drowning it by the waters of the Deluge; and that with him the creation of the world is not a *past* event, and the day of judgment is not *future*. If any man can admit all these conclusions,

he must surely be as metaphysical as the schoolmen were, when with a "nunc stans" they attempted to put a spoke into the wheel of time.

Another attribute constituting the greatness of the Deity, is his Almighty *Power*. By this we mean his ability to do any thing which it is possible for agency to do. The bounds of possibility are known only to himself; but to some extent we are able distinctly to conceive them. It is not possible, for example, that power should put an end to duration, or limit the infinity of space. It is not possible for power to remove matter from one point of space to another, without taking it through the intermediate parts, either in a straight line, or by some circuit. It is not possible for power to transform *virtue* into *vice*, or *truth* into *falsehood;* or in other words, to destroy the distinction between *right* and *wrong*. But in most instances the bounds of possibility are known only by our Maker; and we are liable to suppose many things to be in their nature possible, which he knows to be impossible, and the contrary.

To say God has Almighty Power, is to say, in other words, that he is an Almighty *Agent*. He who does any thing without agency, does it by necessity, which is not *power*, but the *want* of it. Whenever an agent acts, he could, at the same time, have *omitted* the action; and therefore He who possesses the greatest power, enjoys the most perfect *liberty* of any being in existence. Hence it follows, that God is immutable because he chooses to be so; and those who believe he

is immutable of necessity, or because he cannot help it, manifestly suppose him to have no power at all. When God created the world, he could have *omitted* it, otherwise the world was created by *necessity*, and not by *power*. Is not the latter conclusion atheism? The reason why God *cannot* do wrong, is precisely that he *will* not; and his happiness and glory consist, not merely in doing right, but in doing it *freely*. What happiness or glory would arise from doing right by necessity? A clock, or a watch, or a steam-boat, does right in this way, and in no other. An apprehension may be entertained, however, that if God be thus *free*, our happiness is not secure under his government; but let us reflect, whether we are not more safe under the protection of an Almighty Agency, directed by infinite wisdom and benevolence, than we would be under the operation of *necessity*, which cannot be modified in its course by either wisdom or goodness. To what purpose would a being who is destitute of agency possess *wisdom?* And what would it avail for him to have a benevolent intention, when his whole course must be fixed and inevitable, independently of such intention? There is, in short, no other alternative but to believe either that God is a perfectly Free Agent, or to embrace a system of atheism. An intelligent being without agency, that is, without power, however good in his disposition, and however clear in his intelligence, could do nothing; and his understanding could serve no other purpose than to gaze at the course of necessity, as a man bound down with

a chain might look up and watch the course of the wind and the clouds.

The energy of Divine power fills us with amazement; and yet the full extent of it can only be known by the Almighty himself. "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. He compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him!" (Job xxvi. 7.) "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." (Isa. xl. 12—28.)

The *intelligence* of the Supreme Being is equally wonderful. He not only understands the hidden qualities of all material substances; but surveys, at once, and without any confusion or perplexity, the secret thoughts of all human and angelic minds, throughout the whole

extent of the universe! "There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." (Job xxxiv. 22.) A Mind capable of such a vast survey, may well be said to be *wonderful in counsel;* and our little finite spirits are as effectually overwhelmed in the contemplation of such an Intelligence, as we are in attempting to grasp Eternity or Immensity.

It is delightful, however, to understand, that in the operation of all those mighty attributes, infinite goodness is at the centre. Love reigns supreme, uncontrolled, immutable, immense, and eternal. Eternity affords the time for its action, and immensity the theatre; wisdom forms the plan of benevolence, power carries it into effect, truth displays it, and justice defends it. In all this there is a harmony more perfect and complete, than is even exhibited in the serene and untroubled movements of the stars and suns and planets of the material heavens; and as soon will Jupiter fall into the Sun, or the Moon be dashed against the Earth, as *justice* will contradict *mercy*, or counteract any other perfection of the universal Ruler. The greatness of God should make us modest in our conclusions, and not so *immodest* as to believe He is too great a sovereign to be righteous and benevolent in all his actions.

"Moral government," says Dr. Dwight, "is a government of laws; whose nature, and actions, are the great inducements to obedience, and the great means

of order, peace, and happiness, to subjects; *and of honour and reverence to the Ruler.*

"To the existence of such a government it is absolutely necessary, that the character of the Ruler should be such, as that it can, and ought to, be approved by wise and good subjects; and of course a character, in which they can safely, and rationally, confide. But it is impossible, that a ruler, unpossessed of Truth, should be approved at all. Falsehood is a vice, involving every other kind of turpitude. A liar is pre-eminently odious and contemptible in the view of mankind; and the finished depravity of the worst of all beings is exhibited to us by God himself in the memorable declaration, *He was a liar from the beginning, and the father of it.* A God of falsehood would be a monster, whose depravity no mind, less than infinite, could comprehend; and who would of necessity be regarded with absolute detestation and horror." (Vol. I. p. 209.)

Now can any man tell us how Dr. Dwight could say all this, on supposition that God, as a sovereign, can *make*, and *alter*, the principles of virtue at will, so that if He should determine or decree that a character of falsehood should be established as virtuous, and the character of truth and sincerity as vicious, their natures, respectively, would be changed? According to the above quotation, a God who should allow himself to be influenced by bad principles of action, "would be a monster of depravity," without a parallel, and "would

of necessity be regarded with absolute detestation and horror."

For the Divine government to produce either virtue or happiness, "it is absolutely necessary," the Doctor tells us, "that the character of the Ruler should be such, as that it can be approved by wise and good subjects; and of course a character, in which they can safely, and rationally, confide." But how can they "confide" in it, and do this "rationally," if they believe there are attributes in that character which *contradict* each other? Must not that be *vice* which contradicts *virtue?* Is there any thing, except something *bad*, which contradicts *goodness?* If not, then there is no manner of inconsistency between justice and mercy, unless one or the other of them is a bad thing, and consequently a species of "depravity." There is nothing of this nature in the holy Mind of the Almighty; and therefore there is no imperfection, and no conflict, in his providence, in his law, or in its administration.

Yet a government so extensive in its influence and operation, sustaining the interests of distant worlds, and embracing the circumstances and diversified capacities of all orders of intelligent beings, may be, in many of its details, entirely beyond our comprehension. Even the ruler of an earthly empire may sometimes be thought to be a fool or a tyrant, on account of certain official acts which he knows to be essential to the common welfare, but which others, not standing where he does, and seeing only a small part of the system, view

as unnecessary or unjust. What matter of surprise should it be, then, if such events should appear in the vast administration of that Being who balances the planets, and who "holds the waters in the hollow of his hand?" "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" (Job, xi. 7.)

"Perfect and unerring wisdom," says Sherlock, "has no superior wisdom to take an account, or to judge of its actions; nothing can judge of wisdom, but wisdom; and an inferior cannot comprehend a superior wisdom; especially when there is such a vast disproportion as there is between a finite and an infinite understanding; which must of necessity in a thousand instances make *the judgments of God unsearchable, and his ways past finding out:* it neither becomes the infinite wisdom of God in all cases to give an account of his actions, nor the modesty of creatures to demand it." (p. 86.) The same judicious author says again, "Would not any wise man rather choose to be governed by such a perfect and excellent wisdom, as can never mistake, though it vastly exceeds his understanding, than to be governed by a being no wiser, or not much wiser than himself, all whose counsels he can fathom, and see to the end of? It is great pride, and as contemptible folly, to think that God should not be able to do things above our understanding, and to do them very wisely too, though we do not understand them. It is certain that there are ten

thousand things both in the works of nature and Providence, which no man fully understands, and yet which bear the marks and signatures of a most Divine and admirable art and wisdom. Which is most reasonable, to attribute such works to the infinite wisdom of God; or to deny that they had any wise Cause, because we cannot find them out, though we can discern such wisdom in them, as no human art or wisdom can imitate." (p. 103.) Once more: "No being can know how to *govern* a world, who does not know how to *make* it; and any other must be a very unfit judge of the wisdom of Providence; for he can never know when the world is well and wisely governed, because he does not know what belongs to the government of the world. The wise government of all creatures must be proportioned to their natures; and therefore without understanding the philosophy of nature, the springs of motion, the mutual dependence of causes and effects, what end things are made for, and what uses they serve, we can never know what is *fit* to be done, nor what *can* be done, or by what *means* it is to be done, and then can never tell when any thing is done as it should be." (p. 106.)

Mr. Sherlock further illustrates the argument, by the history of Job: "The story of Job's afflictions strikes terror and astonishment into all that hear them: Job himself knew not what account to give of his suffering; and we should have been as much puzzled with it to this day, had we not been acquainted with the rea-

son of his suffering, and with that long and great prosperity wherewith God rewarded his faith and patience; and now no man thinks the sufferings of Job any difficulty in Providence, much less any objection against it. Thus it is with reference to other men; when we see only a scene or two of their lives, we meet with such prosperous or adverse events, as we cannot account for; but could we see from the beginning to the end, in most cases the Divine Providence would justify itself.

"But then the hidden and mysterious designs of Providence relating to Churches and Kingdoms, which comprehend so many great and wonderful revolutions; —these, and such like events, must needs be very obscure and unknown to us, who know not what God aims at in all this, nor what designs He is carrying on. When our accounts of what is past are so imperfect and uncertain, and our knowledge of what is to come much more imperfect; when we know so little of our own age, of our own country, of our own neighbourhood, it is as impossible to understand the reasons of Providence, as it is to understand the wise contrivances and design of a Comedy, by reading one Act, or, it may be, but one Scene of that Act." (p. 131, &c.)

From these arguments and illustrations, the reader may perceive how objections against the goodness of God may be solved by a just view of his greatness; and how unreasonable it must be to yield to any degree of scepticism, on account of our incapacity to understand the design of certain events occurring under

the Divine administration, which to our limited view may appear obscure and unaccountable; but which, when seen in their essential connection with the whole moral universe, may shine forth as the sunbeams of infinite wisdom, rectitude, and benevolence.

Three of the general scenes of Providence which are most mysterious, and which may serve to illustrate our present subject, are the following:

1. Some time after the earth was replenished by the descendants of Noah, God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways," until a degrading idolatry was spread over the earth, accompanied with a general corruption and barbarity, which threatened the destruction of all virtue, peace, and purity. Prostitution was made a part of their religion; and many little children were burnt in the fire, as so many meritorious offerings to the gods!

2. After the gospel was spread over the Roman empire, its ministers and professors became so corrupt, that they introduced the dark ages, in which the light of heaven appeared almost to have been withdrawn from the earth for several hundred years. Dens of wickedness, called monasteries and nunneries, were established through the nations of Europe;—superstition generated corruption, and one bloody scene of murder followed another, until the silent horrors of the Inquisition were fully established, which held all Christendom in the stillness of death, and made kings bow submissively to the sovereign and malignant despotism

of him who was called "the Vicar of Christ upon earth."

3. Some two or three hundred years ago, the several nations of Europe combined their energies to seize upon the defenceless Africans, in order to carry them into hopeless bondage; and they soon established a horrid system of traffic in human beings, which has been the means of hurrying millions to a premature death, either in their passage across the ocean, or by the rigours of oppression which they endured, after arriving at the respective places of their melancholy destination. This bloody tragedy is yet in progress; and in its consummation it will probably have produced as much misery as resulted either from the barbarism of Pagan idolatry, or from the cold and unfeeling malevolence of the Inquisition.

Now the matter of inquiry which puzzles our understanding, is this:—Why should that holy Being, who has all power in heaven and in earth, suffer such shocking scenes of wickedness and misery to prevail in our world, for hundreds of years together?

The only satisfactory answer to this question is, that the infinite mind of the Almighty does not view these matters by themselves, as we do, but in their connection with the vast compass of the intelligent and moral universe, and with the succeeding developements of a futurity that shall have no end. The intelligent inhabitants of other worlds may be looking on, and learning from these facts the essential nature and the destructive

sesults of moral evil. Our own world also, in its future generations, may receive effectual admonition by this course of experience, which it would not receive in any other way. It would now be a very difficult matter to establish Pagan idolatry either among the Jews, or among the nations of Christendom. The lessons of experience which mankind have had upon this subject, will prevent a repetition of those abominations. When the Romish power shall have been overthrown, there is no probability that an Inquisition will again be established to the end of time; because the horrors of the Inquisition which was established during the dark ages, will be effectually remembered, and this remembrance will restrain the passions of posterity. Human nature is still the same; and, were it not for the admonitions furnished by the past history of the world, would be ready enough to play the same game over again. The course of Providence in dividing Protestant Christendom into separate balancing denominations, is a part of the same wise and benevolent scheme of our heavenly Father. There is not a sect among us, perhaps, that would not be as bad as the Papists have ever been, were it not for the lessons of experience, and the checks furnished by the power and influence of rival denominations.

And as to slavery and the slave trade, Providence suffers these things to go on, and to arrive at their zenith, that a thoughtless world may learn by painful experience, that any part of mankind, by tyrannically

inflicting misery upon another part, are thereby sapping the foundations of their own best interests, both for time and for eternity.

God said to Abraham, "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." He suffers wicked nations to progress in crime, till their iniquity is full, in order that the whole universe may see what a diabolical thing sin is, when permitted to exhibit the whole extent of its deformity. For this reason the Supreme Ruler permits the Devil to show himself, and to expose to the public gaze of the creation, the dark and horrid malignity there is in his own mind, and in those servants of his, who are his greatest proficients in the several systems of iniquity. All this is suffered, not that sin may be patronized and encouraged; but, on the contrary, that it may be condemned to eternal infamy, and that intelligent creatures may be effectually set upon their guard against its poisonous influence and destructive ravages.

PART SECOND.

DIRECT EVIDENCE OF GOD'S BENEVOLENT CHARACTER.

SECTION I.

Proofs derived from the self-sufficiency of God.

The Divine character which we purpose to sustain, is given by Dr. Dwight in the following words: "God, when he intended to disclose his perfections to the universe, intended to exhibit them, chiefly, by an endless course of action, in which wisdom, greatness, and goodness, should be supremely, and most clearly, discovered. The highest blessedness, he has told us, and therefore the greatest glory, is found in communicating good, and not in gaining it; in giving, and not receiving. To this decision reason necessarily subjoins her own amen. The great design of God in all things is, therefore, to do good, boundlessly, and for ever; and in this conduct to disclose himself, as the boundless and eternal good." (Theology. Vol. I. p. 85.)

Mr. Watson gives a quotation from Calvin, which appears to assume entirely opposite ground. Mr. Calvin's words are, "How exceedingly presumptuous it is, to inquire into the causes of the Divine *will;* which is, in fact, and is justly entitled to be, the *cause* of every thing that exists. For if it has any cause, then there must be something antecedent on which it depends, which it is impious to suppose. For the will of God is the highest rule of justice; so that what he wills must be just, because he wills it." A part of Mr. Watson's reply is as follows: "He pretends that to assign any *cause* to the Divine will is to suppose something antecedent to, something above God, and, therefore, 'impious;' as if we might not suppose something IN God to be the rule of his will, not only without any impiety, but with truth and piety; as, for instance, his perfect wisdom, holiness, justice, and goodness: or, in other words, to believe the exercise of his will to flow from the perfection of his whole nature; a much more honourable and Scriptural view of the will of God than that which subjects it to no rule, even in the nature of God himself. This will is our rule, because we know that it is the will of a perfect being; but when Calvin represents *mere will* as constituting God's own rule of justice, he shuts out knowledge, discrimination of the nature of things, and holiness; which is saying something very different to that great truth, that God cannot will any thing but what is perfectly just. It is to say that *blind will*, will which has *no respect to any thing*

but itself, is God's highest rule of justice; a position which, if presented abstractedly, many of the most ultra Calvinists would spurn." (Institutes, p. 511.)

Indeed, a will that has "*no respect to any thing but itself*," is supposed to *make* its own *veracity* and *benevolence*, as well as its *justice*. If "what God wills must be just, *because he wills it*," as Calvin says, then what he wills must be *benevolent*, because he wills it: consequently, it would be perfectly benevolent for all creatures to commence their existence in eternal punishment, provided only that the Divine will should choose to *make* it benevolent. To say that nonentity is better than existence, would be a *truth*, provided the Divine will should choose to *make* it a truth; or that to render evil for good would be *justice*, provided the same will should *determine* it to be justice! In short, if our Maker's character is essentially *good*, were it *opposite* to what it is, it would be essentially *evil;* otherwise we say *good* and *evil* are not necessarily *opposite* to each other: whence it would follow, that the character of the devil may have in it no *opposition* to that of the Deity!

Having thus stated our position, in regard to the absolute rectitude, or, which is the same thing, the infinite and uncompounded benevolence of the Almighty, we proceed to examine the grounds on which this great truth is to be established. Dr. Dwight says, "The importance of the question, Whether God is a Benevolent Being, is no less than infinite. Every thing, therefore,

which seriously affects it, must be of high moment to every intelligent creature." (Theology. Vol. I. p. 166.) Dr. Dwight's views on this part of the subject are so excellent, that I shall be excused in giving them at considerable length.

"It is hardly necessary for me to observe," he says, "that the question, concerning the amount of the evidence, which reason gives concerning this doctrine, has long been, and is still disputed. It is well known, that divines and other Christians, as well as other men, differ in their opinions about it; and that the proofs of the divine benevolence from Reason are regarded by many persons as insufficient. I have myself entertained, heretofore, opinions on this subject different from those which I now entertain. As I have not seen it discussed in such a manner as satisfied my own wishes, I shall now consider it with more particularitv, than might otherwise be necessary.

"The *Self-existence*, *Eternity*, *Immutability*, *Omnipresence*, *Omniscience*, and *Omnipotence*, of God have, I flatter myself, been clearly proved by arguments derived from Reason. From these attributes it has, I trust, been unanswerably evinced, that God *is absolutely independent;* that all things, which can be done, or enjoyed, are in his power and possession; and that he can neither need, nor receive any thing. From these considerations it is evident in the

"1st place, *That God can have no possible motive to be malevolent.* It will not be pretended, that *the nature*

of things can furnish any such motive. That to *be malevolent* is a more desirable character or state of being, than to *be benevolent*, cannot be asserted, nor believed. Nor can any motive to this character be presented to God, *from without himself*, or *from other beings*. As all other beings, together with every thing pertaining to them, are, and cannot but be, just what he pleases; it is certain that he can gain nothing to himself by the exercise of malevolence. *Finite beings* may discern good in the hands of others, which they may covet, and at the same time be hindered from possessing, unless by the indulgence of fraud, injustice, or unkindness; or by attacking, and injuring, such, as prevent from gaining the beloved object. Those who possess it, they may envy, or hate. Those who hinder them from gaining it, they may regard with resentment or anger. But it is plain, that these considerations can have no more application to *God*, than the circumstances which give them birth. All good is actually in his possession: there is, therefore, nothing left for him to desire. All beings and events are exactly such, as he chooses either to produce, or to permit; and such as he chose, antecedently to their existence. He can, therefore, have nothing to fear, or to malign. As he gave all, which is possessed by other beings, he can evidently neither gain, nor receive any thing. If he be malevolent, then, he must sustain this character without a motive.

"2dly. *An Omniscient Being cannot but see, that it is more glorious to himself, and more beneficial to his*

creatures, to sustain, and to exhibit a benevolent character, than its contrary: or, in other words, in every respect more desirable.

"The glory of the Creator and the good of his creatures, involve every thing that is desirable. That this truth must be seen by an Omniscient Being, in a manner infinitely superior to that in which we see it, hardly needs to be asserted.

"The desirableness of this conduct, arising from the glory of the Creator and the good of his creatures, seems to present, when we consider it as extending through Eternity, an *infinite motive* to the Creator, to cherish a benevolent character, and *to manifest it in all his conduct.* To the power of this motive there is at the same time no motive opposed. On the contrary, we know, and the Creator, in a manner infinitely more perfectly, knows, that the existence and exercise of a malevolent character would be *infinitely dishonourable to himself,* and in the progress of Eternity infinitely injurious to his creatures. Each of these considerations presents to the Creator an *infinite motive* to exercise *benevolence* on the one hand, and *not to exercise malevolence* on the other. If, then, he has in fact exercised malevolence, he has done it *without any motive,* and *against the influence of both these:* each of them infinite in importance.

"3dly. *The only conduct which a Creator can receive with pleasure from his creatures, must plainly be attachment, reverence, and the voluntary obedience which they produce.*

"Whether the Creator be benevolent, or malevolent, it is impossible that he should not choose to be loved, reverenced, and obeyed. But the real Creator has so formed his works, and so constituted his providence, that the minds of men, irresistibly, and of absolute necessity, esteem a benevolent being more than one of the opposite character. I do not mean, here, that this is the dictate of the heart; but I mean, that it is the unavoidable dictate of the intellect; of the conscience and understanding. The intellect is so formed by the Creator, that it is impossible for it to think otherwise. Any person, who will make the attempt, will find it beyond his power to approve of malevolence at all. If, therefore, the Creator be malevolent, he has so formed his intelligent creatures in this world, that they cannot possibly esteem his character. In other words, he has made them incapable, by a natural necessity, of rendering to Him that regard, which in itself, or in its consequences, is the only possible conduct, on the part of his intelligent creatures, which a Creator can have proposed, when He gave them existence." (Dwight's Theology. Vol. I. p. 167, &c.)

From these luminous arguments it plainly appears, that as the Supreme Being could gain nothing by the exercise of malevolence, so he must have known that he would inevitably lose all.

First, *he would lose all his glory.* A sense of *meanness* is inseparable from a base character. Not only would he be destitute of the love and veneration of his

creatures, but also of all self-respect; for all true glory consists in those attributes, or traits of character, which constitute moral worthiness. This matter God himself has decided. (Exodus, xxxiii. 18, 19.—xxxiv. 6, 7.) Now as such a character as this constitutes all true worth, so the contrary is base and unworthy; as the former is associated with a conscious *dignity*, so the latter produces a sense of *shame*, and the malignant mind cannot help feeling that it deserves universal contempt.

Secondly, *he would lose all his happiness.* All experience proves that malevolence not only inflicts misery on others, but is itself a *source* of misery, in the mind over which it predominates. Every tyrant in existence is compelled to feel, that the more he diffuses misery abroad, the more he increases the weight of it in his own soul. What shadow of evidence can we find in earth or heaven, that there is a possibility for such a disposition to operate in any mind, without producing similar results? As Benevolence is an eternal fountain of enjoyment, so, on the other hand, Malevolence is the dark and dreadful source of all misery.

Thirdly, *he would lose all his wisdom.* Our Maker has decided, that all moral evil is folly, and that no man can live and die devoid of the exercises of benevolence, without being *a fool.* (Luke xii. 20.) Will any one say, that with respect to God, there is no distinction between wisdom and folly, and that with Him, one course of action would be as wise as another? If so, He never

pursues one course because it is wise, or avoids another because it is unwise; seeing with Him all actions are alike, and there needs no intelligent discrimination! On this supposition He has no occasion for any thing else than a "*blind will*," as Mr. Watson speaks, and a *blind understanding* also. The truth is, our Maker always keeps in the right way, not because all ways are alike to Him, but because being above all liability to mistake, He knows the good way from the bad, and chooses the former because it *is* the good way. To say of any being that he can be infinitely wise, and at the same time infinitely malevolent, is a direct contradiction; because malevolence leads to certain misery, and therefore is folly.

Lastly, *he would lose all his labour, from the beginning of the creation to eternity.* The creation of a malevolent being must reflect his own image; and therefore it would exhibit nothing *sublime*, *grand*, or *beautiful.* To what purpose would a creation exist, to be only the instrument of inflicting misery on all creatures, except to cause them to maintain eternal contempt for their Creator? Such a creation would be useless, and worse than useless; and with what a holy and infinite indignation must the God of nature look upon the supposition, that he can be capable of such a procedure!

The argument, in short, is this: good principle, carried out into a uniform course of good action, is the source of felicity, in the Supreme Being as well as in

every other; this is known to Him, without any possibility of mistake; therefore it is impossible for any motive or temptation to enter into his mind, to depart from rectitude, either in principle or in action; because it would be to depart from essential happiness, into all the modifications of mental and conscious misery. To say a Being who infinitely loves *right*, can at the same time have a disposition to influence others to do *wrong*, is a plain contradiction; and hence it follows, from the combination of rational and Scriptural evidence, that *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.*

SECTION II.

The constitution of Nature.

From what has been before proved, we consider ourselves entitled to view the Creation and the Bible in conjunction, supporting the same identical system of Divine truth; and that, far from standing in opposition, they mutually confirm and illustrate each other. The Bible is a luminous commentary upon the visible universe; and we deem it as perfectly ridiculous to set the one in opposition to the other, as to suppose there is something in God which causes him to take delight in contradicting himself.

That the works of nature directly prove the good-

ness of God, will appear from the following authorities and arguments:

The Rev. Richard Watson says, "That huge globe of fire in the heavens which we call the sun, and on the light and influence of which the fertility of our world, and the life and pleasure of all animals depend, knows nothing of its serviceableness to these purposes, nor of the wise laws according to which its beams are dispensed; nor what place or motions were requisite for these beneficial purposes. Yet its beams are darted constantly in infinite numbers, every one according to those well-chosen laws, and its proper place and motion are maintained. Must not then its place be appointed, its motion regulated, and beams darted, by Almighty Wisdom and Goodness?

"This earth is in itself a dead motionless mass, and void of all counsel; yet proper parts of it are continually raised through small pipes which compose the bodies of plants and trees, and are made to contribute to their growth, to open and shine in blossoms and leaves, and to swell and harden into fruit. Could blind thoughtless particles thus continually keep on their way, through numberless windings, without once blundering, if they were not guided by an unerring hand? Can the most perfect human skill from earth and water form one grain, much more a variety of beautiful and relishing fruits? Must not the directing Mind, who does all this constantly, be most wise, mighty and benevolent? Must not the Being who thus continually exerts his

skill and energy around us, for our benefit, be confessed to be always present, and concerned for our welfare?" (Institutes, p. 187.) Thus clearly, according to Mr. Watson, does nature evince the *benevolence* of its Divine Author.

A second authority is Dr. Dwight. Speaking of God, he says, "He saw, that it was becoming his character to unfold his perfections, and to communicate his goodness, to an endless and innumerable race of beings. From an infinite height, he took a survey of the immeasurable vast of possible beings; and in an expansion without limits, but desolate and wild, where nothing was, called into existence with a word, the countless multitude of worlds, with all their various furniture. With his own hand He lighted up at once innumerable suns, and rolled around them innumerable worlds. All these He so dispersed, and arranged, as that all received light, and warmth, and life, and comfort; and all, at the same time, He stored, and adorned, with a rich and unceasing variety of beauty and magnificence, and with the most suitable means of virtue and happiness." (Theology, p. 132.) Again:

"By his immutability, God is qualified to perform, and to pursue, one great plan of creation and providence; one harmonious scheme of boundless good; and to carry on a perfect system, in a perfect manner, *without variableness or shadow of turning.* An immutable God, only, can be expected to do that, which is supremely right and desirable; to make every part of

his great work exactly what it ought to be; and to constitute of all the parts a perfect whole. In this immense work, ONE CHARACTER IS EVERY WHERE DISPLAYED; one God; one Ruler; one Sun of Righteousness; enlightening, warming, and quickening, the innumerable beings of which it is composed. Diversities, indeed, endless diversities, of his agency, exist throughout the different parts of the work; but they are mere changes of the same light; the varying colours and splendours of the same glorious Sun." (Theology, p. 134.)

Quotations might be multiplied, all containing the same substantial statements, that the visible creation speaks an impressive language, that God is a perfectly GOOD Being, without any contradiction; and that his immutable goodness is "DISPLAYED" throughout the whole universe.

But without continuing to gaze on the vast splendours of central suns and surrounding worlds, let us weigh the evidence presented by the consciousness of the mind. What did Adam find his condition to be, before his Maker's workmanship was injured by sin? The very act of healthful *breathing*, he found to be an exercise of happiness. His *eyes*, his *ears*, and other senses, he found to be wonderful mediums of enjoyment, while the beauties of external nature, and the harmony of sounds, delightfully corresponded with the structure of his newly created faculties. His mental energies, exercised in *thinking*, and treasuring up *knowledge* from the great volume of nature, constituted a more sublime

felicity still; and above all, the exercise of *esteem*, *reverence*, *confidence*, and *love*, towards the great Author of all things. Add to this, that God made a helpmate for him, whereby was laid the foundation of *social* happiness. A garden, of God's own right-hand planting, was prepared for them, in which, warmed by the gentle beams of the sun, and fanned by the mild air of Paradise, they had every variety of fruit, calculated to afford enjoyment, and to nourish their constitution. How is it possible to take even a slight glance at a scene like this, without perceiving indubitable proofs of Divine *benevolence*, and of nothing else? In regard to the subsequent ravages of sin, and the consequent interruption of original happiness, these matters are to come under review in a following part of this discussion.

It is incumbent on us first to examine how happiness was provided for in our original constitution, and in the constitution of external nature; a brief specification of which may be exhibited as follows:

First, *intelligence*, with the capacity to advance in knowledge, is a very great source of enjoyment, as all men know by experience, so far as they have properly exercised their mental faculties. The means of knowledge are all around us, and are constantly open to our inspection; and it appears evident, from the vast compass of the universe, that provision is made for the enlargement of this felicity without end:—all nature regularly conducting us to an increasing knowledge of the beauty and glory of the Eternal Mind.

Secondly, our *agency*, or freedom of will, is another gift bestowed on us by infinite goodness. This power is essential to three great purposes: 1. to furnish each individual with the happiness of spontaneous action; 2. to give each the capacity to contribute to the good of society; and 3. to render both men and angels amiable in the sight of their Maker, as his cheerful, free, and voluntary servants and children. Without the gift of moral *agency*, all these great and valuable ends would have been prevented; and both men and angels would have been placed on a level with brute creatures in the scale of existence.

Thirdly, our *conscience*, or moral discernment, is the result of pure goodness on the part of Him who formed our intellectual constitution. Without this, the distinction between right and wrong, the beauty of moral principles, and the glory of rectitude, would be to us unknown. We should have no capacity for either the sweet and heart-cheering consciousness of integrity within ourselves, or the sublime pleasure of appreciating the character of virtue in others. The testimony of a good conscience, and all the rejoicing which results from that testimony, would be unpossessed and unknown by man. Fellowship with God, and admiration of the holy grandeur of his character, would be entirely prevented; and consequently, we should be for ever deprived of the very highest kind of mental enjoyment.

Fourthly, our *social capacity*, including all the benevolent affections, is a wonderful proof of our heavenly

Father's good-will to his intelligent creation. The happiness of loving and being loved, of exercising mutual confidence, and interchanging friendly sentiments and affections, is a happiness proved by constant experience; and none are destitute of it, excepting so far as their dispositions have become corrupted by the sentiments and feelings of malevolence.

Fifthly, another proof of heavenly kindness, is our being endowed with *mental taste;* that is, our having the capacity of pleasure from the contemplation of *beauty, novelty,* and *grandeur;* while the whole creation abounds with objects *beautiful, new,* and *grand.* It would probably require ten thousand years for us to explore the beauties of one world; and how many times ten thousand worlds our great Creator has in his possession, containing new beauties, still more sublime and grand than those contained in the world which is now inhabited by man, we know not, but peradventure we shall know hereafter.

If we add to all this, the senses and appetites of the body, whereby we are brought into immediate contact with the external world, and endowed with so many inlets of enjoyment to the mind, we are constrained to wonder at the divine skill of the Almighty, and to adore Him for the riches of his heavenly bounty; and we have cause to regard with pity the ignorance which overlooks these provisions of divine goodness, and with contempt and indignation, the malignity which despises them.

Now it will be readily admitted, that it was *right* for our Creator to endow us with these faculties, and that it is *right* for his creatures to exercise their given powers, and to have the enjoyment which their proper use is calculated to furnish; whence it follows, that *wrong* conduct, being the *opposite* of right, is that conduct which tends to derange and pervert our original constitution. As the due exercise of our capacities and powers naturally produces happiness, so the perversion of them will inevitably eventuate in misery.

That sin, in its own nature, produces misery, and that this is the precise measure of its turpitude, is a truth of immense importance; and the contemplation of it is necessary, to clear our views of the divine government, to remove out of our way innumerable obscurities and contradictions, and to aid us in forming an harmonious and consistent system of theology. It must therefore be sustained by authorities.

Dr. Dwight says, "It appears to me evident, that the adoption of truth, or falsehood, by the Creator, must be followed by exactly the same effects, which they produce in us. In the former case, he must regard himself with entire complacency or self-approbation; in the latter, with an irresistible consciousness of turpitude and unworthiness. An unlimited sense of excellence on the one hand, accompanied of course with unlimited happiness; on the other, a boundless sense of turpitude, accompanied, for aught that I can see, with boundless shame and wretchedness." (Theology, Vol. I. p. 206.)

Dr. Dwight says, again, "In the Scriptures we are taught, in the clearest manner, that sin is an universal opposition to God, and an universal hostility to his benevolent designs; and that it is universally mischievous to the well-being of the sinner himself, and of his fellow-creatures. Thus we learn, that it is a direct war upon the Creator, and his creatures; a malignant contention against all that is good, and the voluntary source of all that is evil." (Theology, Vol. I. p. 182.) Again: "That disposition in his creatures, which is opposite to his own, is in itself odious, in proportion as his is amiable; and voluntarily endeavours to oppose, and to frustrate his purposes; that is, to diminish, or destroy, the boundless good which he has begun to accomplish. In this view, the rebellion of sinners assumes a most odious and dreadful aspect; and is here seen to be a direct hostility against the benevolent character and designs of God, and against the well-being of his intelligent creation." (Vol. I. p. 191.)

Thus it plainly appears, that the great evil of sin consists solely in the malignant *hostility* of the sinner against God's plan of happiness, and in its being the source of misery. Will not any man find it a puzzling matter to inform us in what else the evil of sin consists?

The same great author exclaims, "What a dreadful instrument would Omnipotence be in the hands of an unjust being! What evils must not all creatures fear! How instantaneously would all hope vanish, all safety cease, all good perish! The universe would become a

desert, a dungeon, an immense region of *mourning, lamentation, and wo.*" (p. 199.) And would the *authority* of such a being deserve to be regarded? Would there be any evil in opposing it? If not, the sole reason why it is a great evil to act in opposition to the authority of God, is that his authority is constantly regulated by justice and benevolence; that is, constantly defending and promoting happiness.

The Rev. Richard Watson says, "It is certain that virtuous affections and actions have been enjoined upon all rational creatures under the general name of righteousness, and that their contraries have been prohibited. It is a matter also of constant experience and observation, that the good of society is promoted by the one, and injured by the other; and also that every individual derives, by the very constitution of his nature, benefit and happiness from rectitude; injury and misery from vice. This constitution of human nature is therefore an indication, that the Maker and Ruler of men formed them with the intent that they should avoid vice, and practise virtue; and that the former is the object of his aversion, the latter of his regard. On this principle all the *laws* which Almighty God has enacted for the government of mankind, have been constructed." (Institutes, p. 221.) That is, actions have been prohibited solely because they produce misery; and others are enjoined, because they are necessary to happiness. Again: "The creation of beings capable of choice, seems necessarily to have involved the possibility of

volitions and acts contrary to the will of the Creator, and consequently, it involved a liability to misery. To prevent this, both justice and benevolence were concerned. Opposition to the will of God, which will is the natural law of a creature, must be the source of misery to the offender, and that independent of direct punishment. This is manifest. Some end was proposed in creation, or it could not have been a work of wisdom; the felicity of the creature must have been proposed as an end, or creation could not have been a display of goodness. The end proposed in the forming of intelligent creatures could only be answered by their continual compliance with the will of God. This implied both the power and the exercise of holiness, and with that the felicity of the creature was necessarily connected. It was adapted to a certain end, and in attaining that its happiness was secured. To be disobedient was to set itself in opposition to God, and was, therefore, to frustrate his benevolent intentions as to its happiness, and to become miserable from its very hostility to God, and the disorder arising from the misapplication of the powers with which it had been endowed. To prevent all these evils, and to secure the purposes for which creative power was exerted, were the ends, therefore, of that administration which arose out of the existence of moral agents." (Institutes, p. 367.)

From these authorities, to which others might be added, we appear to be fairly entitled to the following conclusions: First, that Almighty God, in his original

creation, established a complete plan of universal happiness. Secondly, that all his subsequent conduct, in giving *law* to his intelligent creatures, was to *maintain* this plan, and to prohibit every action that would tend to injure it, or to oppose its operation. Thirdly, that sin, in its own nature, destroys happiness, and tends to universal misery; and that this is the sole ground of its criminality. If any man believes in some other ground of the *guilt* of sin, it might be well for him to cast some light upon the subject, by giving an intelligible *explanation* of his views.

Now if it be true, that all happiness is to be enjoyed within the boundaries of right; and if God gave moral faculties to man, that he might discern these boundaries, and feel his obligation to regard them; then it follows, as above observed, that the gift of *conscience* is a proof, among many others, of the pure goodness of our Creator. His enforcing obligation upon this moral discernment, by the exercise of ruling power, and even by the whole *penal* energies of his administration, far from proving any deficiency in benevolence, will be a perfect illustration of it, as I trust will be seen in the course of our subsequent inquiries and investigations.

SECTION III.

Nature and Tendency of the Divine Law.

THE proposition which we assume, is that God gave *law* to his intelligent creatures, because he knew that one kind of conduct, in its own nature, would produce misery, while the opposite would tend to maintain the happiness which had been provided for in the original constitution of the universe. If all kinds of action were alike indifferent to happiness, no law would be necessary; and neither wisdom, justice, nor benevolence, could have any influence in its enactment. If all actions were alike, as to their influence upon happiness, an abridgment of liberty, by law, would not only be unnecessary, but unkind. For why limit the exercise of agency, in any manner or degree, if there be no necessity for it? If all kinds of conduct in creatures had been originally indifferent to these essential purposes, it would follow, not only that the law was given for the mere display of authority, but that it was the very thing which made an inroad into that universal enjoyment, which, without it, would have remained for ever uninterrupted. But if, on the contrary, opposite kinds of conduct would, in the nature of things, have produced opposite results, then it required all the wisdom and goodness of God, so to form the law, that obedience

would invariably maintain the common welfare. On this ground it is easy to perceive that the law of God furnishes a distinct and impressive argument, in support of the great truth which it is the present purpose to illustrate and to defend.

Law is a rule of action prescribed and enforced by authority. The Being who gave felicity to creatures, and who knows with infallible certainty on what its perpetuity depends, has a right to enjoin that line of conduct which is essential to its continuance; and to prohibit the contrary.

The great principle of his law, we are assured, is *love.* This is an affection which, as consciousness testifies, is a source of enjoyment in the centre of the mind itself, and which disposes the mind to communicate happiness to others. The same Authority which enjoins *love*, prohibits *malice.* Wherefore? Exactly because the former is the source of all happiness, and the latter the source of all misery. For this reason, and this alone, the former is *right*, and the latter is *wrong;* and on this ground the one is commanded, and the other is forbidden. *Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good.* Then to alter it, and make it the *reverse* of what it is, would be to make it an *unholy*, an *unjust*, and a *bad* law. Would it be possible for any being in existence to enact and enforce such a law, without being a tyrant?

But where is this holy, and just and good law of God to be found? In the Bible. Its principles were en-

graven on tables of stone; and the writings of the prophets and apostles are a luminous commentary upon those principles. The Divine Master himself explained it; and assured us that on two great moral axioms, the whole of its details were suspended. Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and thou shalt *love* thy neighbour as thyself? Why? Because thy God is the Fountain of all happiness, and thy neighbour is an equal recipient of it with thyself. Therefore *the love of universal happiness*, constitutes the essence of the Divine government. God demands the entire love of the heart, because He is infinitely worthy of it, and because the exercise of it is essential to the well-being of every creature. If there were any vestige of injustice, cruelty, or partiality in God, then this law would require us to love injustice, cruelty, and partiality, with all our heart. If so, would not the law itself have a corrupting tendency upon our faculties, and lay the foundation of eternal misery?

In regard to the second branch of the law, it is thus commented on by the apostle: "Love *worketh no ill* to his neighbour; *therefore* love is the fulfilling of the law." This plainly implies, that the sum total of the prohibitory part of the law, in relation to our neighbour, is that we shall do *no ill* to him; that is, do no action that will interrupt his happiness. If we follow out the law in all its details, and scrutinize its particular precepts, we shall find that this is the principle of the whole, from which there is no deviation. Such a law clearly

shows the character of the Almighty to be most lovely; and the Book through which it runs is thereby proved, to every candid mind, to be of Divine original.

From the beginning to the end of that holy Book, all cruelty, injustice, unmercifulness and deceitfulness, are prohibited in the most solemn manner; we are commanded to be merciful, even as our Father in heaven is merciful; to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God; to do good to our fellow-creatures to the uttermost of our power, and to avoid every thing that would injure them, or interrupt their tranquillity. Now to suppose God thus carefully to promote these dispositions and practices among his creatures, and at the same time to suppose Him to exercise the opposite himself, is an insult to common sense, and implies a direct charge of hypocrisy and tyranny against "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity."

From what has been said, it follows, that *authority* in God is that which *commands* us to be happy, and which *forbids* every thing that would lead to misery: consequently, divine *sovereignty* is nothing more nor less than the authority of infinite benevolence, requiring the maintenance of that plan of universal happiness which it had previously established. We have therefore the same reason to love God for the exercise of his *authority*, that we have to love Him for *giving us life, and preparing for us the happiness of life eternal.*

SECTION IV.

The Gospel.

It is so far from being the nature of benevolence to love sin, that the more pure and ardent it is, the greater and more intense will be its abhorrence of that which is evil. Nevertheless, it exercises good-will to the sinner, and delights to pursue every just measure to accomplish his reformation, and thereby to deliver him from his misery.

In regard to the difficulties connected with the introduction of moral evil, they are to be considered afterwards. We are now to view God's treatment of sinners, as a distinct proof of his essential kindness of character. He loved us, when he established the foundation of felicity in our original constitution; he loved us, when he gave a holy law to guard and perpetuate that happiness; but more than all this, "God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world."

This wonderful process demonstrated how much God was in *earnest* to bring us back to happiness; how he could *condescend*, how much he could *endure*, to bless and to save us. To say the process was unnecessary—

that it was a mere empty *show* of kindness, that meant nothing, and accomplished nothing—alas! this is to insult the infinite *tenderness* of love. It is to charge Heaven with crocodile tears, and with hypocritical agonies!

In Jesus Christ the amiable character of God was made *visible*. He tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. He was as a lamb, without blemish, and without spot. He said, I am meek and lowly in heart—kind, condescending, and gracious,—and whosoever hath seen me, hath seen the Father. That is, were the Father to become visible in any other way, so that you could behold the disposition of his mind displayed, he would appear exactly as you see me, with the same holy mildness, and the same unwavering opposition to all sin. This condescending method whereby the Deity brought himself near to us, that we might converse with God, and he with us, as a man converses face to face with his friend, is an advantage of unspeakable value. And what an eternal *honour* it is, and will be, to the human race, that God and man are united in such a wonderful manner!

What an unspeakable advantage it is to mankind, to have such a *Teacher*, such a faithful and true witness, who came to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and also such a model for our imitation! The great Author of our being came down in human form,

not only to *teach* us what is right and good, but also to *show* us how to perform it.

The distinguishing proof of goodness, however, in this economy, consisted in this—that "he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity:—he died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Through this sacrificial offering of himself, he procured *forgiveness* for guilty man, in a way which secured the honour of God in the exercise of clemency, by magnifying his law, and sustaining the interests of universal society.

The peculiar displays of divine goodness in this redeeming plan may be summed up in the following manner:

1. *Life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel.* Full assurance is given, that we shall live for ever; and that through Jesus Christ the works of the devil shall be destroyed. Ample provision is made for the renovation of the soul, for the resurrection of the body from the dead, and for our establishment in the perfection and glory of an endless life.

2. *Repentance and remission of sins* is granted to Jews and Gentiles. The chief of sinners are not excluded from this gracious provision. Sins that were *red like crimson*, and fearfully augmented in number, and which exposed the sinner to the awful miseries of perdition, are freely and fully forgiven, on condition of repentance, faith in Christ, and submission to his divine government. To bestow eternal happiness upon holy

angels who never offended, is pure benevolence: then what must it be to pardon the guilty, and to elevate to the enjoyments of heavenly blessedness those who deserved the damnation of hell?

3. *The gift of the Holy Spirit.* This is a heavenly energy from God, whereby the lusts of the flesh are counteracted, our polluted nature is sanctified, and our spirits made "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." This brings an assurance of the Divine favour; for "the Spirit of God doth bear witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God."

4. *Adoption into the Divine family.* "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Truly, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." How wonderful, that the holy God should take to his bosom, in the most intimate fellowship, those who had made themselves children of the devil by wicked works! The plan of redemption was intended to open the way for Him honourably to do so; and therefore redemption was a proof of love and kindness unutterable.

5. The privilege of becoming *joint heirs with Christ.* Who is Christ? He is the Son of God, and the heir of all things. For sinners to be regenerated and made joint heirs with Him, is an honour and a privilege which no language can express; for it implies the full possession of God, and of all God's creation, so far as we shall have capacity to enjoy. This must be an aston-

ishment to all heaven for ever and ever; and the ground of the astonishment is precisely *the length and breadth, and depth and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.* When redeemed millions shall thus be *filled with all the fulness of God,* they will inquire with ineffable amazement, Why is it thus with us? and the only answer they will find through the depths of eternal duration will be — THERE IS NONE GOOD BUT ONE, THAT IS GOD. They find themselves thus honoured, and thus filled with all possible felicity, because unfathomable goodness would have it so. The same kind hand of mercy is reached forth to all the fallen race; for "there is no respect of persons with God." He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The only reason, therefore, why any are excluded from salvation, is that they "despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth them to repentance; but after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

The conclusion is therefore most satisfactory and indubitable, that such an immense provision for our glory and felicity, made by such a wonderful process as the incarnation, labours, sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, is a perfect demonstration of a benevolence that is both infinite and eternal. The gospel brings the truth of this into the empire of sin and

misery; and evinces, that the floods of ungodliness and crime cannot drown the Divine love, nor in any degree diminish the Almighty's kindness and good-will for all creatures that are capable of virtue and happiness. It takes our "feet out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and sets them upon a rock." It "establishes our goings, and puts a new song in our mouth, even praises unto our God;" a song this, which will never grow old, but which will have new notes added to its beauty, harmony and glory, while immortality endures.

SECTION V.

Direct Testimony of the Scriptures.

THE first thing revealed in the Bible, is that the revelation which it contains comes from the Creator of the world. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

And what kind of a work does the Bible say our Creator has performed? It says "God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was GOOD. And God saw *every thing* that he had made, and behold, it was VERY GOOD." All that God made, all the universe of matter and of mind, was originally VERY GOOD:—that is, was in its own nature calculated to produce happi-

ness, and nothing else; for it is presumed none will affirm, that any thing which naturally produces misery, is *very good.* In the last book in the Bible it is said—*For thy pleasure they are, and were created.* Whence it follows, that God intended all his works should contribute to happiness; and he made them very good, because it is his pleasure that others with himself should have all possible means of felicity.

Moses said, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.* By this he meant, give me a clear view of thy character. God answered, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." What was this? "The Lord, the Lord God, *merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.*" (Exod. xxxiii. 18—xxxiv. 6, 7.) Again: "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise *loving kindness, judgment* and *righteousness,* in the earth: for in these things I *delight,* saith the Lord." That is, I delight in exercising them myself, and in seeing them exercised by all others. Is not this an unmixed character of perfect goodness?

Without quoting the hundreds of passages which declare directly that God is a good Being, let us attend to

our Saviour's own account of the matter. "A certain ruler asked him, saying, Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *none is good, save one, that is God.*" The ruler addressed him as a man only, and in that character he refused to be called good; because, though in a comparative sense there are good men, yet in comparison of God none other deserves to be called good; so full and perfect is His goodness, above that of all created beings. "O *righteous* Father," said Jesus, "the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee." (John, xvii. 25.) "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth.*" (John, i. 14.) All true glory, then, is contained in the *fulness of grace and truth.* And in what way does the apostle John say the only begotten Son declared the Father unto us? After attending to the public and private instructions of his Master for years, he tell us what is the sum total of the matter: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*" (1 John, i. 5.) By the word *light* he means a pure character of benevolence, according to his repeated declaration afterwards, that *God is love.*

The word *holiness*, as applied to God, means the *perfection of all moral excellence.* He commonly called

himself *The Holy One of Israel,* and is expressly said to be *glorious in holiness.* Now as he showed to Moses that his *glory* consisted in being *abundant in goodness and truth;* and as he is *glorious* in *holiness,* it follows, that the word holiness signifies the abundance of *goodness* and *truth.* Accordingly, the unceasing song of heaven is, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come—Thou art worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (Rev. iv. 8—11.)

Now is it possible for language to express any thing more clearly than these inspired writers have stated the soul-inspiring truth, that God is a Being of an unmixed character of perfect goodness? Unless we believe, therefore, that the Bible contradicts itself, it is not possible that any other passages in the same book, concerning wrath or vengeance, or any thing else, can have a meaning *opposite* to the views above given. Human language is equivocal; but except it be so explained as to leave nothing equivocal in the character of Him who made us, we shall find ourselves at sea, without a chart or a compass.

SECTION VI

Religious Experience.

If God not only *requires* us to do good, but actually *transforms us, by the renewing of our minds,* does not this abundantly exhibit the reality of his own holy and gracious disposition?

True Christians have "the love of God shed abroad in their hearts," and have become "partakers of the Divine nature," by being "created anew in Christ Jesus;" and they are reinstated in the image of God, which consists in *righteousness and true holiness.* Will they not, therefore, with one mind and one mouth (or testimony) glorify God, by bearing witness that his Spirit inspires them with universal love? Their good-will embraces the whole family of man; while they feel themselves constrained to "lay aside all *malice,* and all *guile,* and *envies,* and *hypocrisies,* and all *evil speakings.*" Will it be said that God gives them a character *different* from his own, in that very process which is intended to restore them to his *own image?* If not, then religious experience, as it comes from God, proves that he himself is entirely free from *all malice, and all guile:—without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

The deeper and more intimate the communion is, which a Christian enjoys with his Maker, the more clear and full is the impression on his consciousness,

that God is the source of light, and love, and purity, and happiness. As well might any one attempt to persuade him that he sees darkness in the sun at noonday, as to try to make him believe there is any thing else than boundless good-will in the mind of the Deity.

One of the disciples said, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, If any man love me, my Father will love him; and we will come and make our abode with him." This is an internal manifestation to the consciousness of the soul, that God exercises parental good-will to us, and enables us to make returns of sentimental gratitude and devotion. The reality of this internal manifestation, as it is sometimes given, a man can no more doubt, than he can doubt the presence and operation of the solar rays.

But this spiritual light, it may be said, however clear to the person in whom it resides, affords no evidence whatever to others. This is not exactly correct. So far as persons are *renewed in the spirit of their minds*, and give evidence of it by a corresponding holiness of life and conversation, so far their regenerated characters afford proof to others, that they have been with Jesus. Hence he says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." How will men *glorify* Him? By acknowledging and embracing the glory of his character, as it is thus manifested by its transforming influence on the minds and hearts of true Chris-

tians. As these are made good men by the influences of God, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, how plain and convincing a proof is this to all spectators, that the *Fountain* must be glorious, from which such streams as these proceed!

It will avail nothing to say that this is all enthusiasm; for so far as the men in question prove by their actions, that they are men of strict veracity and integrity, and that on all other subjects they "speak forth the words of truth and soberness," so far their character exhibits intelligible and rational evidence, such as ought to convince all candid minds, that they are not enthusiasts. Their testimony of God is every way worthy of Him; for when they say God has done these great things for them, the uprightness of their lives proves the sincerity of their declaration, and their utter aversion to all falsehood and delusion; therefore let all who see their good works yield to the truth, and glorify their Father which is in heaven.

If too many professors live beneath their privilege, neither having the evidence within themselves, nor exhibiting the fruits of it to others, this is no proof that the light itself is not clear; but that these men "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." An atheist sees no evidence of God in the heavens; not because there is none, but because the clouds of pride and prejudice within him exclude the evidence from his mental discernment. In like manner a formal Christian

walketh in darkness, when he might have "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" but he "will not come to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

True Christians not only prove the Divine goodness by the uprightness of their lives, but also by their composure and confidence in a dying hour. Thousands of them have exhibited clear signs of exultation in their last moments; and none were ever known to express regret and apprehension at that period, except for not having walked with God as they ought to have done. Is not this a clear experimental proof that God favours the virtuous, and gives them delightful assurances of his paternal complacency? None but a good Being would thus favour the good; and therefore the expiring tranquillity of the devoted followers of God is a closing demonstration of the essential *excellency of our God.*

The religion which is established in the soul by the influence of God, is *full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.* The more the soul becomes like its Creator in disposition, the more it abhors every species of deceit, sectarian bigotry, injustice and cruelty. It feels a holy and inexpressible hatred of sin, and at the same time a glowing love and compassion for the sinner. The regenerated man finds his love for universal happiness to be the centre of all his desires, purposes and actions; and it is because sinners *destroy much good,* and because their punishment will be necessary to protect the good which they would

otherwise destroy, that he becomes reconciled to their punishment. There is in him no sentiment of revenge or retaliation; and no feeling of malevolence to be gratified at another's wo. He is conscious of no bitterness or resentment towards any order of sinners in the universe; but on the contrary, is filled with every sentiment and feeling which would cause him to rejoice with joy unspeakable, to see all created beings "love the Lord their God with all their heart," and enjoy a "fulness of pleasure at his right hand for evermore."

The plain conclusion is, therefore, that as these men are filled with such sentiments by the operation of God, and as this influence is intended to make them partakers of his own moral image, He of course is himself without any duplicity or contradiction, and with an infinite fulness and perfection, of the same invariable disposition. A soul filled with the love of God, has thereby an internal evidence of the moral perfection of the Supreme Being, which is like the brilliant demonstrations of unclouded sunshine; and to all eternity will this blaze of truth and love shine forth, and fill the heavenly regions with *joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

That a good man, as he approaches heaven in disposition and in prospect, has a corresponding enlargement of view, and permanency of glowing consciousness, that God is an uncompounded fountain of loveliness, is proved by Christian experience throughout the world. But the proof must be specified by particular instances. Let one suffice to close the present section. The Rev.

John Fletcher, who was one of the most devoted and amiable men of God that ever lived upon earth, preached a sermon after being taken with his death sickness. "Mercy," we are informed, "was the subject of his discourse; and while he expatiated on this glorious attribute of the Deity, its unsearchable extent, its eternal duration, and its astonishing effects, he appeared to be carried above all the fears and feelings of mortality." Mrs. Fletcher says, "On Wednesday, he told me he had received such a manifestation of the full meaning of those words, *God is love*, as he could never be able to express. It fills my heart, said he, every moment: —*God is love!* Shout! shout aloud! I want a gust of praise to go to the ends of the earth!"

Mrs. Fletcher tells us that "He always took a peculiar pleasure in repeating or hearing those words:

> 'Jesus' blood through earth and skies,
> Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries!'

Whenever I repeated them to him, he would answer, 'Boundless! boundless! boundless!' He now added, though not without much difficulty,

> 'Mercy's full power I soon shall prove,
> Loved with an everlasting love!'"*

We conclude, therefore, that *religious experience* illustrates and confirms all other kinds of evidence, in proof of the essential and unmixed benevolence of the Deity; and that it increases in brightness and glory, as the saints of God draw near to the sublime realities of immortality.

* Benson's Life of Fletcher, p. 367, &c.

PART THIRD.

NO PROVIDENTIAL ACTS OF OUR CREATOR, AND NO PROVISIONS OF HIS MORAL GOVERNMENT, WHEN CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD, AFFORD THE LEAST EVIDENCE OF DUPLICITY IN HIS CHARACTER.

SECTION I.

Varieties of capacity, and original circumstances of our existence, afford no such evidence.

THAT man was not made a greater, wiser or stronger creature than he was, is no objection to Divine goodness, unless it can be proved that the best plan possible would have been to create one order of creatures only, endowed with equal capacities. But there may arise a vastly greater amount of happiness from a gradation of orders, of various capacities, than from the plan of entire equality; and this variety may be for ever necessary for the improvement and welfare of all. Who but God can have a complete knowledge concerning the possibilities of being? "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught

him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh isles as a very little thing." (Isa. xl. 13.)

Now if it be the best plan to have various orders of creatures, of different grades and powers, the contrary of which it is impossible to prove, *man* must come in somewhere; and who will presume that the Almighty has put him in the wrong place? If there is want of goodness in not placing us above Angels, what a great deficiency of it must there have been, in placing so many animals *below* us! "Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" If he placed all creatures in a state of happiness, the life of every one was a distinct proof of his goodness.

It may be objected, however, that there was a want of goodness in forming us with a *capacity of pain*, or a liability to fall into misery. But so far as we understand our own nature, we know that the same faculty which, when rightly directed, gives enjoyment, will, when perverted or oppressed, be the means of unhappiness. This is true of our *senses*, of our *appetites*, of our *mental* and *moral* faculties. What greater source of enjoyment than a good conscience? And what misery on earth more pungent, than that which arises from the same moral power when injured and oppressed with

guilt? The *eye*, which is the medium of happiness in a mild and pleasant light, is the channel of affliction when oppressed with too strong a blaze. The *ear*, which is delighted with the harmony of sounds, is hurt with the grating harshness of jargon and discord. The same *stomach* which affords enjoyment by the influence of nourishing food, is the organ of pain when oppressed with materials that are unwholesome and poisonous. So it is through all nature: and when we leave nature and experience, in our attempts to ascertain the possibilities of being, we are at once in a wide sea, without a bottom or a shore. Who but God can know what capacities are *possible*, and among those that are possible, which would furnish the greatest amount of happiness? Nor will it avail any thing to say our capacity for pain was too great; for this, so far as we know, could not be made less, without at the same time, and in the same proportion, diminishing our capacity for pleasure. The more capacious the faculties are which a creature has, the greater of course must be the misery of their perversion and disorder.

It may be said, again, that goodness should keep away the *means* of misery: though poison may afflict the stomach, and discord offend the ear, yet if there be no poisons and no discords in nature—if there be no storms of cold, nor oppressive degrees of heat—in short, if there be nothing around us to give pain to our faculties, and every thing to furnish enjoyment, the mere *capacity* to suffer would do us no harm. What should

hinder perfect Benevolence from causing this to be our situation? Supposing it were even so—still it would be possible for us to destroy our own happiness: for first, in regard to our appetites, all experience proves that our well-being depends upon the *quantity* as well as the *quality* of the materials used; therefore though the qualities of all substances in nature were invariably salutary, yet an improper *quantity* might be productive of misery. Secondly, in regard to *mental* and *moral* happiness, the means of it are within ourselves, and do not depend on the qualities of surrounding nature. If the mind itself should exchange *love* for *malice*, it would barter *happiness* for *misery*. Thirdly, in regard to *social* enjoyments, though a man's body might be fanned with all the mildness of the air of Paradise, though all the material qualities of nature were exactly suited to his constitution, yet the conduct of his fellow-creatures might be very afflicting; because the capacity for *social pleasure*, when crossed and oppressed, becomes the medium of *social pain*. The same mental sensibility which is delighted with the manifestation of friendly affections, is hurt by the expressions of scorn and hostility.

It may be said, moreover, that all causes of misery might have been prevented, by the denial of *agency:* though certain kinds of conduct would be productive of misery, yet if we were all *bound* to the right, our happiness would then be safe. Say rather, that a large amount of our happiness would thereby be *prevented;* for our consciousness clearly testifies, that mental en-

joyment depends very much upon the free exercise of our voluntary powers. Why else is *liberty* held so dear, all the world over? Is it not a plain contradiction to say a man is at *liberty*, at the same time that his will is *bound* to one certain course of action? And besides, for aught we know, freedom of will is essential to intelligent existence; so that the existence of a creature with mental endowments, and destitute of all agency, is as impossible as for matter to exist without occupying space.

The objector is willing, however, to have his liberty, provided all *authority* be removed out of the way, that he may be left to pursue any plan of conduct he pleases. And suppose even this were granted, who could tell the amount of misery his voluntary actions would produce for himself and others, in the course of future duration? "It is matter of constant experience and observation," says Mr. Watson, "that every individual derives, by the very constitution of his nature, benefit and happiness from rectitude; injury and misery from vice." (pp. 221, 367.) "In the Scriptures we are taught, in the clearest manner," says Dr. Dwight, "that sin is an universal opposition to God, and an universal hostility to his benevolent designs; and that it is universally mischievous to the well-being of the sinner himself, and of his fellow-creatures." (Vol. I. p. 182.) Hence it follows, that if the sinner were unrestrained by authority, his evil conduct would nevertheless be productive of an immense amount of misery to himself and others.

But the objection may be pressed still further. It may be inquired, Why did not God make us of such a constitution, and place us in such circumstances, that all kinds of conduct would be alike productive of happiness? We might as well ask, why God did not create a kind of matter that could exist without occupying any part of *space;* for this would be no more impossible, than to change evil into good.

It was the opinion of Dr. Dwight, that it would be impossible for God himself to be happy, independently of moral rectitude. "It appears to me evident," says he, "that the adoption of truth, or falsehood, by the Creator, *must* be followed by exactly the same effects, which they produce in us. An unlimited sense of excellence on the one hand, accompanied of course with unlimited happiness; on the other, a boundless sense of turpitude, accompanied, for aught that I can see, with boundless *shame* and *wretchedness.*" (Vol. I. p. 206.)

Indeed, the above objection supposes God has power to change virtue into vice, and vice into virtue: that He can transform truth into falsehood, and falsehood into truth;—misery into happiness, and happiness into misery. In other words, that he can reconcile contradictions and accomplish impossibilities.

It remains, that there is nothing in our constitution, as God originally formed it, that is any impeachment of Divine Benevolence.

SECTION II.

Responsibility.

Man having a conscience, or moral discernment, is held accountable for his conduct. He has as invincible a conviction of the distinction between *right* and *wrong*, as of that between *existence* and *non-existence*. Without this power, he would be deprived of all the felicity arising from moral approbation;—all the enjoyment resulting from a consciousness of dignity and worth of character in himself, and from the approbation and confidence of others.

Dr. Dwight says, "Rectitude, the sum of personal worth, consists in rendering voluntarily, that which others have a right to claim. But on the scheme of the atheist, no claim can be founded, and none exists. There is, therefore, nothing due: of course, no duty can be performed, and no rectitude experienced. Hence that *high, unceasing, and refined enjoyment*, which attends *the sense of rectitude*, can never be found by the atheist. Without *confidence*, no society, no friendship, no union, no connexion, between intelligent beings can exist. The world, dispossessed of it, would become an image of hell; and distrust, jealousy, wrath, revenge, murder, war, and devastation, overspread the earth." (p. 107.)

From this view of the matter, we discover the importance of our moral powers, and how clearly they evince the goodness of our Creator. But why does God hold us *accountable* for the exercise of these powers? Why does he exercise *authority* over us? Is this, too, a demonstration of benevolence? Certainly: for all social enjoyment depends upon it. After God has formed a plan of general happiness, and fitted our natures to its salutary influence, it is perfectly gracious in Him, to interpose his authority for its protection, by forbidding that conduct which would introduce a state of social misery. Those who reply against God on this account, cannot sustain their objection, except on the supposition that the only thing which would constitute the Almighty a perfectly good Being, would be for Him *to allow his creatures the privilege of doing wrong.* For their doing wrong is all that his authority *forbids.* He prohibits a certain course of action because *it is* wrong, and not in order thereby to *make* it wrong: for what form of language can more directly charge God with being the *author* of evil, than to say a course of action was not evil till he *made* it so? To forbid an action that in itself is good, is commonly called *tyranny;* and to forbid or enjoin that which is *indifferent,* is that kind of conduct in a ruler which is said to be *capricious;* there can be no regard either to goodness, or justice, or wisdom, in the enacting of such a law; therefore no such law was ever enjoined on man by his Creator.

But *why* is an action wrong? Exactly because it

produces misery, by opposing and infringing God's plan of universal happiness. God requires that all creatures act according to this plan, that misery may be excluded, and happiness be universal and eternal. "As doing good," says Dr. Dwight, "is the entire employment of every rational being, whose heart, and labours, are thus conformed to the pleasure of his Maker, the good actually done, cannot fail, in the progress of the system, of becoming immensely great. Where the joint labours of any society are directed *solely to the purpose of producing happiness*, these labours, if wisely directed, must of course furnish happiness, proportioned to their extent, energy, and duration. Happiness is the end of the *whole* system. Such is the end, which God proposed in the creation of man; such its nature; and such its propriety. How plainly is it the *best* and *most glorious* end, which can be aimed at by man, or accomplished by his Creator!" (Theology, p. 388, 389.)

The same great author says again, "The law of God is good, as well as just; profitable to those who obey, as well as honourable to him who is obeyed. Obedience to this law constitutes the only real worth of rational beings; and is the sum of all those affections, and their consequences, which form the internal happiness of man; the most essential and valuable part of his happiness. From this character, and from this alone, spring the peace and self-approbation, the internal harmony and delight, which are the proper 'prize of virtue;' the independent and eternal possession of every good mind.

The *love, which is the fulfilling of the law*, is a vital and immortal principle of doing good to all men, both friends and enemies, at all times, and in every manner. Nor is there any real and voluntary beneficence, beside what springs from this principle. Rational beings, wholly under its influence, would form a perfect state of happiness in any world; and such beings, freed from all restraints, would, if destitute of it, *create consummate misery*. He, then, who refuses obedience to the law, is guilty of gross injustice to God, relinquishes all personal excellence, peace, happiness, and worth; and, renouncing all *voluntary usefulness* on the one hand, prepares himself, on the other, to be *a nuisance to the universe*." (p. 460, 451.)

Hence arises the *guilt* of transgression: it interrupts the plan of happiness, and "creates consummate misery;" therefore there is *ill-desert* in the perpetrator; that is, he deserves *blame* and *punishment*, in proportion to the turpitude of his evil conduct. But by what measure, it may be inquired, are the degrees of guilt to be ascertained? The obvious answer appears to be, that an action deserves blame and punishment in proportion to the amount of happiness which it destroys, and the amount of misery which it produces; modified, however, by the *knowledge* and *intention* of the agent. These matters are precisely known by the Supreme Being only, and, therefore, he alone is qualified to *judge the world in righteousness*.

But on what ground, and to what extent, is it *neces-*

sary to punish creatures for their evil conduct? It is necessary, in order to *counteract* the evil, and to *prevent* or to *limit* its general deleterious consequences, so far as the punishment of the culprit may contribute to these results. The *necessity* of punishment, and the *justice* of it, are the same. No man can successfully controvert this position, unless he can prove that justice requires the infliction of *unnecessary* punishments; and surely, in so far as it does this, it must be an *unncessary Attribute.* Are there any Attributes of the Deity of this description?

What is justice, but that modification of goodness which *requires* that the flow of happiness shall not be interrupted by a violation of the plan on which it is founded? Justice is the *authoritative action of goodness,* and nothing more; at least, if any thing else be contained in it, we have never yet seen the explanation and the proof. If justice could require unnecessary punishment, it might require unnecessary *obedience,* and would run into all the claims of the capricious ruler and the tyrant.

Dr. Dwight says, "That the omniscience of God cannot but discern all the differences of good, and distinguish, with complete accuracy, and in all cases, the greater from the less, will be admitted of course. That perfect benevolence must choose this plan in preference to any other, is equally evident. Indeed, I conceive of no possibility, that benevolence can, in any being, prefer a smaller degree of *what he thinks good* to a greater.

Much less can this be attributable to God. As he knows perfectly what is really good; so on this only must his desire, or delight, be fixed; and with the more intenseness in proportion to the greatness of the degree, in which it does or may exist. The present system, or the system actually adopted by God, is therefore, to say the least, the best and most perfect system of good." (pp. 189, 190.)

Now will any man say that "the best and most perfect system of good" is that which contains within itself a vast amount of *unnecessary* punishment? This cannot be; for if that part of the punishment be removed which is *unnecessary*, the system will be better; otherwise it would follow, that misery, in itself, and for its own sake, is a perfect "good."

Dr. Dwight says again, "As God is benevolent, it is impossible that he should not be just. The benevolence of God, is itself complete proof of the justice of God. A Being, willing, as a benevolent one necessarily is, to do *more* good to others than justice demands, cannot be willing to do *less;* the only manner in which he could possibly be unjust." (pp. 196, 197.) Hence it follows, that justice is an essential modification and operation of benevolence; and therefore unless it be the nature of the latter to delight in seeing misery exist unnecessarily, no such thing as unnecessary punishment ever had or ever will have place, under the administration of the Almighty.

The Rev. Richard Watson, speaking of God, says,

"His goodness is limited by *moral* not by *physical* reasons; but still, considering the globe as the residence of a fallen and perverse race, that glorious attribute is heightened in its lustre by this circumstance; it arrays itself before us in all its affecting attributes of mercy, pity, long-suffering, mitigation and remission. It is goodness poured forth in the richest liberality, where moral order permits its unrestrained flow; and it is never withheld but *where the general benefit demands it.* Penal acts *never* go beyond the *rigid necessity* of the case; acts of mercy rise infinitely above all desert." (Institutes, p. 216.) This needs no comment; and the present authorities may be closed with a quotation from Mr. Sherlock. Speaking of the General Deluge, he says, "Had God destroyed the whole race of men, and created a new man, to inhabit the new world, this would have argued some *defect* in the first *creation:* for there can be no pretence for destroying man, to make him again, but a design to make him *better;* to correct that in a second, which experience had discovered to be faulty in the first. But though the wisdom of *government* will admit of various trials and experiments, the wisdom of *creation* will not. The government of free agents must be accommodated to their natures and dispositions, not only to what God made them, but to what they make themselves; and therefore the methods of government must change, as men change themselves: but the *natures* of all things are made only by God; and if there be any *fault* in them, it is chargeable upon

the Divine Wisdom; and to make man, and destroy him, and make him again, would argue a great *fault* somewhere." (Divine Providence.)

From the above quotations it appears, that man was made as good as God could make him; that God's general plan of creation embraced the best possible system of good; that in his moral administration, no favour is withheld from any one, but where the general benefit demands it; and that penal acts never go beyond the rigid necessity of the case. If so, what can any man ask more? Will he ask to be free from responsibility altogether? Then it is plain he must either be destitute of life, or he must be a *beast.* And does it show want of benevolence in God, that he has brought creatures into existence with higher capacities of enjoyment than those possessed by irrational animals?

But why, it may be inquired, should we be subjected to such a *serious* responsibility? The obvious answer is, that accountability must be proportioned to the value of the interests committed to our trust. He who had only one talent committed to him, was required to improve one only; but he who had five, was accordingly accountable for five. Now let it be considered, that man has immortal faculties to guard, and to improve. A system of social happiness, extending to the whole intelligent universe, and eternal in its duration, is committed to the keeping of every man, in proportion to the extent of his ability; and his individual conduct will have an influence for good or for evil, which, if not

counteracted by the Divine administration, would, so far as we can see, extend through the whole system, and be eternal in its duration. Hence our responsibility must be great; and we are constrained to own, that in strict propriety of speech, there is no such thing as a *little sin.* But if God should make the plan of happiness less perfect and less valuable than it is, would He not thereby diminish his benevolence, to relieve us from so serious a responsibility? Must the mental and moral faculties of men and angels be taken from them, and the whole creation consist of irrational animals only? Alas! what must be the turpitude of a man who would rather be a *beast*, than to be under the necessity of giving an account of his conduct! A beast he cannot be: he must either aspire to the character and the society of angels, or he will inevitably sink to that of devils. All the above objections to the plan of Divine goodness appear to amount to this, that man wishes to have the privilege of being wicked, and desires that the Almighty would provide for him an eternal heaven of sin. If we may judge of the consequences of sin, as we witness them in the present world, what a hell of misery this would necessarily be! *Vain man would be wise;* and he often thinks he is very wise; but it will be made manifest at a future day, that all his cavils against the just and gracious conduct of his Maker originate either in his ignorance and inattention, or in his deep corruption and malignity.

SECTION III.

Hazardous circumstances.—Temptation.

It must be admitted, that perfect goodness will guard creatures from danger, as effectually as they *can* be guarded; because an amount of goodness which neglects to do this, is not as great as it might be, and therefore is not perfect.

It has sometimes been considered a matter of surprise, that Angels should fall, when they had no tempter; but this, it is presumed, has resulted from a mistaken view of the nature of temptation. A certain writer has represented its process to be, first, a simple evil thought; secondly, a strong imagination; thirdly, delight; and lastly, consent. This *thought* may arise in a person's mind, without being suggested by another; and the whole process may follow by his own individual agency. An error is present to his contemplation, and if this error be credited, its influence will be the same, whether originally conceived by the individual, or presented by the agency of another.

What the first sin of fallen angels was, we know not; but we have strong intimations that it was peculiarly a sin of *pride*. They might have entertained an ambitious opinion, that their own good, and the good of the universe, would be promoted by their assuming a higher

station. This at once supposed that God had not placed them right; and that their own wisdom and energy were adequate to improve the general system. A refusal on their part to *keep their first estate*, and a voluntary determination to *leave their own habitation*, and to pursue enterprises in another department, may have threatened to disorganize the whole plan of happiness, and to diffuse misery and ruin throughout the creation.

Supposing this to have been the true state of the matter, what could the Almighty do to prevent the evil? Could he do more than to *warn* his erring creatures, by telling them the whole truth of the case, so far as they were capable of receiving it, and enforcing obedience by the whole weight of his own Divine authority? Will it be said he should have annihilated his erring creatures, or put an absolute restraint upon their agency, because he saw they were going to do wrong? But who can prove that such an act of administration would not have led to a greater evil? Confidence in the Supreme Ruler is essential to universal happiness; and it is absurd to suppose that the Creator must do wrong, to prevent his creatures from doing so. What can a good ruler do, previous to transgression, more than to instruct, command, persuade, warn and threaten? After rebellion has actually taken place, he can justly proceed further, and may not only bind or imprison the offender, but punish him as his crimes deserve, for the defence of the public happiness; but to inflict punishment in order to *prevent* transgression, before it is committed,

is a practice unknown to all righteous jurisprudence. It is easy to say, that our Maker might take away the agency of his creatures, when he sees they are going wrong; but to take away their agency, would be to *bind* them, and this would be to *punish* them previous to transgression; for it is difficult to conceive how a much greater punishment could be inflicted on a man or an angel, than entirely to take away his agency. And whether indeed it would be possible, for agency to be *entirely* taken away, without the destruction of our mental existence, is a matter which may well produce doubt and hesitation.

Now it appears to be evident that creatures, however innocent and pure, who exercise their minds without any constraint, may originate *pride*, *unbelief*, *dissatisfaction* with their condition, and other mental evils, from the voluntary exercise of their own thoughts; and hence they may resolve upon courses of action that are wrong. The great difficulty of accounting for the origin of moral evil has arisen chiefly from the doctrine which has been so firmly settled in the minds of thousands, that all events are brought about by the eternal and immutable decree of God; that creatures are not free agents, but always act as something necessarily operates upon the will, like the force of water when it produces the motion of a mill-wheel. On this supposition, the origin of evil is indeed a great mystery; for it supposes that evil must be *put into the mind*, to impel the will, before a creature can be capable of doing any

thing amiss. Then who first put that evil into the created mind, but the Creator himself? So long as we keep this hypothesis at the bottom of our inquiries, in vain may we try to clear up the mystery; for the further we advance, the greater and thicker will the difficulties surround us; and, if I mistake not, we shall find no stopping place on this side of perfect atheism!

But admit that intelligent creatures are really *agents*, a truth which is proved by the clear testimony of consciousness, and then the mystery of original sin amounts only to this—that a free agent acted wrong when he ought to have acted right, by imbibing the vain delusion, that he would thereby, in some way or other, better his condition.

We find it to be true, in regard to men, and for aught we know it is equally true of angels, that they are liable to be enticed into evil by their *appetites* and *senses*. The woman *saw* that the tree was *good for food*, and desirable to make one *wise;* and she took thereof, and did eat. The *desires* of the mind, for *knowledge*, *esteem* and *power*, may be viewed as internal appetites; those connected with the body, as external. The internal, it cannot be doubted, belong to angels as well as men; and may have a like tendency to lead them into evil. Here an objector may at once exclaim, Why did God make us with such a constitution, and thus implant the causes of temptation in the very centre of our existence? Let him reflect a few minutes upon another question: How would it be possible for us to *enjoy* the good gifts

of heaven *without appetites?* Could we enjoy *food*, or *water*, or any thing else, if we had no *appetite* for one thing or another? Could a man have any enjoyment in *knowledge*, or in the esteem of others, if he had *no desire*, or mental appetite, for these things.

"In any supposable world," says Dr. Dwight, "pleasure may of course attend transgression; because good may and must exist, (if good exist at all) which cannot be lawfully enjoyed. The good, which lawfully belongs only to others, may be seen, coveted, and seized; and thus for the time enjoyed. Finite beings may, therefore, be induced by the present prospect of this pleasure to transgress; or in other words, to sin. It has not hitherto been shown, I presume it cannot be shown, that God is by his perfections obliged to prevent the existence of Moral Evil, originated in this manner, nor of natural evil, as its proper punishment. Should it be said, that the perfections of God cannot fail to operate in such a manner, as to produce the greatest good; I acknowledge it. Still it cannot be proved, nor be rendered in any degree probable, that the greatest possible good will not be found in a system, into which evil has admission." (Theology, pp. 116, 117.)

A system which would make the entrance of moral evil impossible, would of course exclude all the happiness of free agency; and, so far as I can see, all the happiness of intelligence. Animal appetite might exist in such a system, and animal instinct; but how finite

intelligent agents could exist, without the power to do wrong, is incomprehensible.

"From our natural and original need of being improved by discipline," says Bishop *Butler*, "it comes to pass that creatures, made upright, fall; and that those who preserve their uprightness, raise themselves to a more secure state of virtue. It seems distinctly conceivable from the very nature of particular affections or propensions. For, suppose creatures intended for such a particular state of life, for which such propensions were necessary; suppose them endued with such propensions, together with moral understanding, as well including a practical sense of virtue as a speculative perception of it; and that all these several principles, both natural and moral, forming an inward constitution of mind, were in the most exact proportion possible, i. e. in a proportion the most exactly adapted to their intended state of life; such creatures would be made upright, or finitely perfect. Now, particular propensions, from their very nature, must be felt, the objects of them being present, though they cannot be gratified at all, or not with the allowance of the moral principle. But if they can be gratified without its allowance, or by contradicting it, then they must be conceived to have some tendency, in how low a degree soever, yet some tendency, to induce persons to such forbidden gratification. The least voluntary indulgence in forbidden circumstances, though but in thought, will increase this wrong tendency, and may increase it further, till, pecu-

liar conjunctures perhaps conspiring, it becomes effect; and danger of deviating from right, ends in actual deviation from it. Now, it is impossible to say, how much even the first full overt act of irregularity might disorder the inward constitution, unsettle the adjustments, and alter the proportions which formed it, and in which the uprightness of its make consisted. But repetition of irregularities would produce habits: and thus the constitution would be spoiled, and creatures, made upright, become corrupt and depraved in their settled character. But, on the contrary, these creatures might have improved and raised themselves to a higher and more secure state of virtue, by the contrary behaviour, by steadily following the moral principle. For, by thus preserving their integrity for some time, their danger would lessen, since propensions, by being inured to submit, would do it more easily and of course; and their security against this lessening danger would increase, since the moral principle would gain additional strength by exercise; both which things are implied in the notion of virtuous habits. Thus, virtuous self-government is not only right in itself, but also improves the inward constitution or character." (Analogy, pp. 141, 142.)

All persons, indeed, who have fairly tried the experiment, know that virtuous acts acquire the advantage of habit; the more the principles of moral goodness are contemplated by the mind, and adhered to by the will, the more firmly do they become seated and fixed in the conscience and affections; and the greater and more

sublime is the enjoyment which they furnish. In this way, it is probable, all the inhabitants of heaven have become confirmed in goodness, after having passed through a suitable state of instruction and discipline. We must sustain the views above given, by another authority.

"Some men's great quarrel is," says Mr. Sherlock, "that God made such a creature as could sin, and be miserable; that is, that God created Angels and Men; that he endowed them with reason and understanding, and a liberty of choice; for such creatures as can choose, may choose wrong. What is it then they find fault with in God's making Angels and Men? Is not the idea of a reasonable Being, and a free Agent, the idea of an excellent and a happy Creature? Are there any greater perfections than knowledge, and wisdom, and understanding, and liberty of choice? Is there any happiness like the happiness of a reasonable nature? Nay, is there any thing that deserves the name of happiness besides this? Will you call senseless Matter, nay, will you call Beasts happy? And is the only idea of a happy nature in the world, a reasonable objection against creating Goodness?" (On Divine Providence, p. 273.)

The same author says, again, "To make a reasonable creature without liberty of choice, is a contradiction: for what does reason serve for, but to direct our choice? And indeed all the pleasures of virtue, which are the greatest pleasures of human nature, result from

this liberty, that we choose well when we might have chosen ill; and if it becomes a God to make a happy nature, it becomes him to make a reasonable and free Agent, though many such creatures may make themselves miserable." (p. 275.)

In regard to Adam's peculiar state of trial in Paradise, the sneers of infidelity are ridiculous. It was a plan of infinite wisdom and goodness to set the agency of this new-made creature into action, in a way perfectly corresponding with his nature, and suited to his infant existence. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was planted in the midst of the garden, by the hand of parental kindness; not, indeed, to furnish food for their sustenance, like the other trees of the garden; but as a *monument* of Divine authority, and a perpetual remembrancer of Adam's subjection, and responsibility to the great Author of his life and happiness. This was intended to produce a wholesome moral influence on the mind, which was a matter of higher importance than merely supplying the wants of the body. The tree in the midst of the garden was a standing monitor, visibly calling to remembrance Adam's benign Creator and Benefactor. The majesty of God was stamped upon it, as the sacred property of heaven, and man was forbidden to take it at the peril of his life. By eating this fruit he set his Creator at defiance, cast off his authority, and renounced his moral government. In this act there was unbelief, distrust of God, self-sufficiency, and a hostile declaration of independence; and

hence the foundation was laid for perpetual war against God, and consequently against the system of universal happiness.

Had our first parents maintained their ground, their victory over the devil would have had results, in all probability, of great moral importance to the universe. Their Maker placed them within the reach of temptation, not that they should sin, but that they should stem the torrent, and "overcome evil with good."

"God never tempted any man." Why then does he place men in circumstances where he knows they must and will be tempted? He does so that they may exercise their agency in resisting evil, in order to its subjugation. Who was ever placed in circumstances of greater temptation than the Lord Jesus Christ? Did the Father place him there in order that he might be led into sin? Just the contrary: he placed him there to resist and overcome the power of evil, and to "destroy the works of the devil." The mild but magnanimous Redeemer faced the evil with heavenly resolution, and his "fury it upheld him, even to the death of the cross." This whole process was the steady course of love resisting malice, or virtuous energy "overcoming evil with good"—the only way in which it ever can be overcome. This great Captain of our salvation calls all his servants to fight under the same banner, and with the same weapons. He knows they will have powerful temptations: yet he himself does not tempt them to sin; but on the contrary encourages and stim-

ulates them to resist it, if necessary, even unto blood; that under his divine protection and guidance they may fight the good fight of faith, conquer hell, and lay hold on eternal life. Evil is abroad in the universe, and it must be overcome by the action of virtuous love; hence virtuous beings, while conflicting with evil, must face the storm of temptation; and so far as the armies of the living God maintain their steady course of virtuous energy, so far the powers of evil are weakened and driven back. Captives are taken from the enemy, by the armoury of heaven; and the hosts of hell are proportionably diminished and intimidated. Hence we see, that the action of God, and that of the devil, are precisely opposite: God only tempts men to resist and conquer sin, while the devil tempts them to surrender themselves to its influence, and to become its abject slaves.

SECTION IV.

The Fall and consequent Misery of Man.

WHEREFORE, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. (Rom. v. 12.)

"This doctrine, it must be acknowledged," says Dr. Dwight, "is connected with many things very mysteri-

ous, and very perplexing. These, adding embarrassment to reluctance, have, in many instances, persuaded men to refuse the doctrine, in spite of the testimony of experience and Revelation. For myself," he continues, "I readily confess, that if I saw any mode of avoiding the evidence by which it is established I would certainly reject it also." (p. 435.)

That man is a sinful creature by nature, appears to be established by as incontestable facts, as that a wolf is naturally voracious, or that a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. The strong bent of the mind to wickedness does not indeed show itself in infancy; neither does the savage fierceness of a tiger exhibit itself when the animal is quite young; but it is as true that Adam's children naturally grow up into the love of sin, as it is that beasts of prey grow up into an increasing thirst for blood. For any man to deny this position, appears to be about as bold and reckless a defiance of common sense, and common observation, as it would be to deny that mankind are naturally subject to bodily disease and death.

From this deplorable condition of fallen humanity, the inference is clear, that there is a malignant poison in sin, calculated to astonish the whole creation. Sin diffuses a deleterious influence, not only through the faculties of the individual sinner, and through surrounding society, but down to the latest generations of posterity! Dr. Dwight may well call this a mystery; and it is truly and emphatically *The mystery of iniquity.*

Moral evil sends its soul-withering venom through all the departments of created existence; it defiles the fountain, and corrupts all the descending streams of humanity; and then it lifts its brazen front to heaven, and assumes the attitude of defiance against the throne and majesty of God!

But why is it that Divines, for hundreds of years, have found this doctrine to be so "very perplexing?" Exactly because they have not admitted that the misery produced is really and essentially in the nature of sin; but that it is to be resolved into the predestination, or vengeance, or imputation of our Creator. The subject must indeed be perplexing, sufficiently so to lead us into atheism, while we suppose sin was no very great evil till the Almighty was pleased to make it a great evil. This is the gordian knot, which has tied down and hampered the human understanding, and has had the chief influence for centuries in confusing our conceptions of religious doctrine. But let the truth be understood correctly, and it will be seen that in sin itself lies all the evil, and all the destructiveness; and that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

The increased violence of appetite, the rage of evil propensity, and consequent hazard of the soul, have been produced partly by the original transgression, and partly by the voluntary conduct of every sinner, which increases the depravity of his nature. God is so far from being the Author of these things, that he does every thing to restrain the wicked, and to guard them

from evil, that wisdom and goodness can do. Sinners regularly nourish and strengthen the evil tendencies of their nature, from childhood to manhood, and then turn about and blame God for putting into their constitution causes of temptation which they cannot overcome!

And besides, what natural appetite or propensity is there, which can be urged in palliation of such crimes as profane cursing, swearing, and blaspheming the name of God? We sometimes hear boys of ten or twelve years old insulting heaven in this manner, as though they were firmly settled in the resolution, so soon as they learn there is a Supreme Being, to let the universe know that He shall be the object of their eternal contempt. From such beginnings of juvenile wickedness, a terrible harvest overspreads the globe; which, emptying its inhabitants, sends forth vast and mournful accessions to the world of wo.

Such facts as these prove indubitably, that the wickedness of mankind arises, not merely from the violence of fleshly temptation, but from a deep and inexcusable hatred of God and of all goodness. They treat their Maker with scorn and derision; and seem at a loss for language, with which to show their contempt for his authority! While "the wicked" thus "contemn God," they also hate and torment one another. What is the general history of all ages and all countries, but a history of ambition, deceit, rage, malignity and devastation? It is difficult to conceive how any combination of demons could manifest a much greater amount of

dark hypocrisy and intrigue, of tyranny, tumult, and blood-thirsty malevolence, than we find exhibited and detailed almost through the entire history of Adam's apostate race.

Now it may be asked, how is it conceivable that a *good* God should be the author of such a *bad* world as this? Why does he not *prevent* all this wickedness? He might prevent it, to be sure, by either drowning all mankind, or by burning up the world with fire. Or he might build penitentiaries all around the globe, and confine all sinners, each in his own appointed cell; but even this would not destroy the wickedness of their *souls;* and thousands and millions of them would probably continue to curse him to his face, as they did before.

The apostle says, the reason why God does not hurry the world to judgment, is that he is "long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He may, at the same time, be teaching a lesson to a vastly extensive Universe; and may be instructing mankind also, and preparing the way to effect a universal reformation in the race of Adam, during future ages, without doing violence to any person's agency. By degrees, and after a long course of painful experience, the stupid creatures may peradventure be prevailed on to consider, and to surrender to the mild reign of Eternal Love. It is great folly and presumption to cast reflections either on the wisdom or goodness of God on account of his suf-

fering evil to rage as it does in this part of the creation; for He has immensity under his superintendency, and has an eternity, in which to accomplish his infinite designs.

But it may be objected, that our state of trial in this world, surrounded as we are by so much evil example, and having within ourselves a depraved nature, renders it morally impossible to be virtuous; especially as we come into life ignorant of ourselves and of every thing about us; therefore our present state of probation for eternity is inconsistent with perfect benevolence. This objection may be answered in the three ways following.

First, the plea of *ignorance* is set up with a very ill grace by mankind; for one of the most astonishing events in nature, and one of the most general and inexcusable crimes, is a heedless and obstinate course of *inconsideration.* The Gospel may invite, the Law may thunder, Providence may smite them—Heaven, Earth and Hell may be in motion to arouse mankind into thoughtfulness; and still, *they will not consider.* They then have the effrontery to say the Almighty is deficient in goodness, because he leaves them in a state of ignorance! And with the next breath, perhaps, they change their ground, and pretend that they are *too wise* to receive instruction, even from God himself!

Secondly, there would be weight in the above objection, if our great Sovereign should make a stern demand of abstract righteousness, and deal with every one upon the absolute principles of inexorable law; but the whole

force of it is broken by the consideration, that the gates of *mercy* are standing open night and day, and that through the plan of redemption God bears long with us, and grants us the privilege, if we will repent, of receiving a free and full *pardon*.

Thirdly, the deep trials, conflicts, and hazards of our present condition, may be seen by our Maker to be necessary to our ultimate and final establishment in eternal happiness; and the lessons which we learn in this stormy wilderness, it is likely, will be advantageously remembered by us, for ever and ever.

"Upright creatures," says Bishop *Butler*, "may want to be improved; depraved creatures want to be renewed. Education and discipline, which may be in all degrees and sorts of gentleness and severity, are expedient for those; but must be absolutely necessary for these. For these, discipline, of the severer sort too, and in the higher degrees of it, must be necessary, in order to wear out vicious habits; to recover their primitive strength of self-government, which indulgence must have weakened; to repair, as well as raise into habit, the moral principle, in order to their arriving at a secure state of virtuous happiness.

"Now, whoever will consider the thing may clearly see, that the present world is peculiarly fit to be a state of discipline for this purpose, to such as will set themselves to mend and improve. For, the various temptations with which we are surrounded; our experience of the deceits of wickedness; having been in many in-

stances led wrong ourselves; the great viciousness of the world; the infinite disorders consequent upon it; our being made acquainted with pain and sorrow, either from our own feeling of it, or from the sight of it in others: these things, though some of them may indeed produce wrong effects upon our minds, yet, *when duly reflected upon*, have all of them a direct tendency to bring us to a settled moderation and reasonableness of temper; the contrary both to thoughtless levity, and also to that unrestrained self-will, and violent bent to follow present inclination, which may be observed in undisciplined minds. In short, that kind and degree of experience which the present state affords us, hath a tendency to give a practical sense of things very different from a mere speculative knowledge, that we are liable to vice, and capable of misery. And who knows, whether the security of creatures in the highest and most settled state of perfection, may not, in part, arise from their having had such a sense of things as this, formed, and habitually fixed within them, in some state of probation? The snares and temptations of vice, are what render the present world peculiarly fit to be a state of discipline to those who will preserve their integrity; because they render being upon our guard, resolution, and the denial of our passions, necessary in order to that end. And the exercise of such self-government, in the practice of virtue, has, from the make of our nature, a peculiar tendency to form habits of virtue, and

a more intense exercise of the virtuous principle." (Analogy of Religion, pp. 144, 145.)

Let not such thoughts as these be called vain speculations; for nothing can be justly viewed in that light which has a tendency to remove or refute objections against the goodness of our Creator. We are apt to think he deals hardly with us; but did we understand, as He does, how necessary this discipline is to our secure establishment in eternal happiness, in what a different light would his dispensation appear!

Such views are abundantly sustained by the clear testimony of revelation. When our Father *chastens* us, it is for our *profit*, that we may be *partakers of his holiness.* When our faith is *tried*, even as by fire, this is done that it may be found *unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.* Blessed is the man that *endureth temptation;* for when he is *tried*, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Tribulation *worketh* patience, &c. And our light affliction, which is but for a moment, *worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

We conclude, therefore, that Infinite Wisdom saw it was better to suffer the world to be peopled by fallen Adam, under a system of redeeming grace, than to cut him off, and people the world by another created pair; therefore the wise Creator resolved upon this course, notwithstanding the immense abounding of sin which he foresaw would follow, that he might give a great lesson

to the whole Universe, and overrule and counteract the evil, for the production and security of a vast amount of glory and everlasting happiness.

The most perplexing part of this subject, is the *depth* and *violence* of that corruption of nature which we have derived from the fall of Adam. But this matter has been distorted and obscured by being connected with false doctrines.

First, it has been represented that this evil disease has been brought upon Adam's posterity by the appointment of the Creator himself; that original corruption, or the strong bias to evil in man, is a spiritual death, *judicially inflicted on all Adam's posterity for the first offence.*

Secondly, that Adam's *guilt* has been transferred to his children, by imputation, whereby they are rendered culpable, and are exposed to eternal punishment for his sin.

Or thirdly, that *the original corruption of their nature* renders them *guilty*, and exposes them to eternal punishment. If this depravity is itself spiritual death, judicially inflicted on them, then it seems the infliction of one penalty makes them guilty, and exposes them to another penalty! Hence it has been supposed,

Fourthly, that if a Saviour had not appeared, the whole race of mankind, from the days of Adam to the general conflagration, would have gone regularly into an eternal hell, without the possibility of any soul escaping. Now to common sense this would be the same

thing as for all mankind to have been born in hell, or placed there at the first moment of their existence. No marvel if this view of the subject should be "perplexing;" for it would destroy every attribute of the Supreme Being, and would be infinitely more reproachful to him, than it would for him to have blown out the sun and all the stars of heaven, before Adam was spoken into life.

Had no Saviour been provided, it may be presumed that the guilty pair would have been called immediately to judgment, and punished according to their works. As a Saviour was provided, Adam and Eve were placed in a gracious state of probation, and all their children are born into the same state. Those of them who die in infancy gain more in the second Adam than they lost in the first; the effects of the fall are removed from their souls, and a future resurrection secured for their bodies; "for as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."—And "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The mystery of temporal death passing upon infants, is no greater than its passing upon the whole animal creation; and both these mysteries may have a connection with the scheme of redemption, and with its ultimate results, which will remove every cloud, when those "little ones shall always behold the face of our Father who is in heaven."

We are puzzled with our Creator's dispensations, because we do not see to the end of them; and there is no necessity that we should be such volunteers in mys-

tery, as to connect with them doctrines of our own invention, which have no other basis than our imagination, the authority of our sect, or the venerated creed of our fathers.

Another false doctrine which augments the difficulty of original corruption, is the supposition that this depravity is so violent as to *compel* men to live and die actual sinners, and thus to make their perdition unavoidable.

The force of evil propensity is indeed deep and dreadful. It is "foolishness bound up in the heart;" a constraining energy or "law in the members;" a thirsting appetite for evil; a raging fever in the soul; occasioning an imbecility like a man's feet sinking in the mire. But let it be remembered, that provision is made in the mediatorial system for the energy of a counteracting principle. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other." This balances the probationary state of man, and doubtless fits it in the best manner possible, for the regeneration and recovery of a fallen soul.

It is true that all Adam's children, who live to maturity, become, more or less, actual sinners; the surrounding objects of sense operating upon corrupt propensity, in their state of ignorance, seems to produce a kind of constraining force upon their faculties, whereby they are influenced to go astray. Yet this necessity is not absolute; and in after life they persevere in crime, not only with a very free will, but with an amount of *obsti-*

nacy, that excites the just indignation of heaven. The strength of motives and influences which they *resist*, is wonderful; and they often persevere in this course of resistance for thirty, forty, or fifty years. Now to say a man's agency is in such a condition that he *cannot* do right, at the same time that he avoids doing right only by *resistance*, appears to me to be as plain a contradiction as can be formed in human language.

The sinner, far from striving to overcome the evil lusts of his heart, has spent years in carefully nourishing them, and in fighting against every thing that would give them any disturbance. Though he originally derived them from nature, or from Adam, yet he has now made them his own, and has vastly increased their strength. Hence it is said, "A man is tempted when he is drawn away of *his own* lust, and enticed." These lusts he has made his own, by assiduously nourishing, feeding, and guarding them against all the attacks of truth, justice, and heaven. The *pride* of a man's heart, for example,—how carefully has it been cherished, and guarded, and strengthened, by repelling and hating every thing of a humiliating tendency!

When men employ their lives in this manner, as thousands are known to do, it is perfectly absurd and false to say they are forced into sin and perdition, by the unconquerable violence of their internal corruptions. If they would exercise as strong and persevering an agency in resisting these lusts, as they exercise

in resisting truth, and the Holy Spirit, who will venture to say that grace would not give them the victory?

It is on the ground of our having made internal corruptions our own, in the manner above stated, that we are required to *repent* of these deep and inveterate roots of sin. Not that we are to repent for what Adam did, or for having been born his descendants, or for having been begotten in his image and likeness; but for having made original corruption our own, by cherishing it in our will, loving it in our hearts, and causing it to conceive, and to bring forth sin and death. (Jam. i. 15.) The centre of true repentance is here; and if all sinners in the world would thus renounce the spirit of rebellion, which they might do, they would, through the atonement of the Saviour, every one be saved: for God is *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

The agency of sinners in persevering in crime and impenitence, is a most raging, resolute, and insulting agency: they contemn God, and proudly set him at defiance. They freely and voluntarily choose to be malevolent. They glory in their shame; and delight to spurn truth and goodness from them, with sovereign contempt and scorn. The apologies urged in their excuse, therefore, from the fall of Adam, and from their supposed moral inability to do any better, are false and groundless; and will be found to be so, when "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Original sin has been involved in mystery, to give plausibility to the favourite doctrine of eternal election and reprobation. All Adam's children are represented as being born guilty, and as deserving eternal damnation, as soon as they come into life; therefore the conclusion is fondly urged upon the human understanding, that as they *all* deserve perdition, free grace (i. e. sovereign partiality) may elect *some*, and pass by all the others, without doing them any injury. There are those, indeed, who disclaim this system, and yet are fond of the doctrine of infant guilt; but it is because they hold to certain other views of the Divine character and government, with which the doctrine of eternal reprobation is necessarily connected. We shall have occasion, in the sequel, to show that this position is manifest and indisputable.

SECTION V.

Subsequent treatment of the fallen race.

The first act of the Divine Being after the transgression in Paradise, was to declare war against the serpent; and in that declaration, intimations were given of intended mercy for man.—*The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.*

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast eaten of the tree, of which I said, thou shalt not eat of it,

cursed is the ground for thy sake." Had the Divine purpose been to execute judgment without mercy, the curse would doubtless have fallen immediately upon *the man*, as the previous curse did upon *the serpent;* but as it passed over him and fell upon the *ground*, a state of trial and discipline was at once established. The guilty pair were driven from their native abode, into a state of banishment, where, as Mr. Fletcher observes, all things around them bore the stamp of desolation for their sake. They were subjected to *labour*, *sorrow*, *pain*, and *death*. Of this severity, complaints have been uttered, or entertained, through all generations of mankind. The pure goodness of the Deity has been doubted; and wrathful or unrighteous dispositions have been imputed to him. He is suspected of delighting in vengeance; and hence he has made the life of man a scene of almost insufferable wo. But that these insinuations are groundless and unjust, will appear from the following considerations.

First, the good actually enjoyed under the present arrangements of Providence, vastly overbalance the amount of evil suffered. We commonly have five hundred days of health, for one day of sickness; and any man who will exhibit a correct history of his life, will furnish abundant evidence, that when his enjoyments are justly estimated, they greatly outweigh all the afflictions and sorrows which the providential hand of his Maker has laid upon him.

Secondly, a large amount of the sufferings of man-

kind in the present world, is the immediate result of their own wickedness. Shall they continually *deceive*, *defraud*, *oppress* and *murder* one another, and all the while complain of Heaven, on account of the sorrows that are endured under the sun? Let any family take an impartial account of its *domestic* miseries, and see if nine-tenths of the amount will not be found to arise from the *pride*, *caprice*, *obstinacy*, *peevishness*, *tyranny* or *absurdity* of husbands, wives, children, servants, brothers, and sisters. Shall members of the same household thus torment one another, and then blame God for their calamities and vexations? And even the sorrows of an individual, what are they, for the most part, but mental pangs arising from the corruption and folly of his own soul?

Let it be considered also, in the third place, that the afflictions which Providence sends upon us, would not be so frequent nor so heavy as they are, were it not that we render them necessary, by our own inexcusable frowardness and obstinacy. The wicked are thereby *restrained*, sometimes brought to consideration and repentance; and the people of God are guarded, corrected, and urged forward in the way of everlasting happiness.

"If we believe the history of the creation," says Sherlock, "the Divine goodness displayed itself in a most beautiful and glorious scene; the new-made world, and the new-created man, were perfect and happy. This was the world which God made; such a happy

world as it became perfect goodness to make: and hence we learn what the goodness of God is, and what it would always do; for when the Divine goodness made the world, he made it what he would have it to be.

"But man did not continue what God had made him: he sinned, and by sin brought death and misery into the world. And therefore, though we do not now see such a happy state of things, we must not hence conclude, that the world is not governed by perfect goodness; but that a perfect state of ease and happiness in this world, does neither become the providence of God, nor is good for sinners. But though God be always the same, as good now as he was when he at first made the world, and as he will be when he shall reward all good men in the resurrection of the just, yet the degenerate state of mankind requires such a mixture of *good* and *evil*, as we now see, and feel, and complain of in this world." (Divine Providence, p. 249.)

The same author says, again, "To put man into a state of probation and trial, to recover that immortality he had lost, was an act of great goodness: and whatever severe methods are used to reform sinners, is as great an expression of *goodness*, as it is to force and to compel them to be happy; as it is to cut off a *hand* or a *leg*, to preserve life. And if we will but allow this world to be a state of trial and discipline for another world, and wisely consider, not what simple and absolute goodness, but what the goodness of *discipline* re-

quires, it will give us an easy answer to all the objections against the goodness of Providence. Good men themselves, were they as happy in this world as they could wish, would not be very fond of another world, nor learn those mortifying and self-denying virtues, which are necessary to prepare them for a spiritual life: and bad men would grow more in love with this world, and sin on without check and control. The miseries and afflictions of this life wean good men from the world, and lay great restraints upon bad men; which justifies both the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God, in those many miseries which mankind suffer." (p. 252.)

In short, if there are great calamities and heart-rending judgments abounding over the earth, it is because the obstinate bent of man's will to moral evil is very great, and his actual wickedness enormous; and all the restraining chastisements of Providence are found to be barely sufficient to keep the world from utter ruin and depopulation. For such an abandoned race, therefore, to complain of the severities of Heaven, is as ridiculous as it is presumptuous and inexcusable. All men who are acquainted with themselves, and who are disposed to acknowledge the truth, will not hesitate to own, upon a retrospect of their whole lives, that however great their sufferings may have been, they were much less than their iniquities justly deserved; and every honest man will be constrained to say, *Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.*

SECTION VI.

The Wrath of God—Its Principle and Nature.

In the holy Scriptures our Creator sometimes speaks of his *wrath*, *vengeance*, *indignation*, and *fury;* but it is very evident from his manner of speaking, that he is never in a *passion.* On the contrary, he speaks with the same mild and unruffled dignity, when speaking of his wrath and vengeance, as he does when exhibiting his benevolence and mercy.

Take an instance: "So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the Lord. Thus will I accomplish my WRATH upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar—to wit, the prophets of Israel which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord God." (Ezek. xiii. 14.) Again: "Stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his FURY—therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: thus saith thy Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, behold, I have taken out of thy hand the dregs of the cup of my FURY; thou shalt no more drink it again." (Isa. li. 17—21.) Once more: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold your God will come with VEN-

GEANCE, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." (Isa. xxxv. 4.)

These are specimens of the serene and sentimental manner in which the great Sovereign of the universe speaks of his wrath, fury, and vengeance; and the attentive reader will perceive this remarkable peculiarity throughout the whole of the Old and New Testament.

Now the question before us is this: does the wrath or vengeance of the Lord proceed from the *same source* with his mercy and kindness, or from a *different* source. Is wrath, in a holy Being, any thing else than *the energy of love?* Or is it something *opposite* to love? There are two kinds of wrath, that are to be carefully distinguished; the one is the action of justice, which flows from love; the other, the operation of injustice, which proceeds from malevolence. The devil is represented as a very wrathful being, and we are told *he was a murderer from the beginning.* It will doubtless be granted by all Christians, that there is no such wrath as this in the Almighty. Nay, it must be admitted, that if the Divine character be *opposite* to the character of the devil, which none will deny, the wrath of God proceeds from an *opposite* principle; therefore as the devil's wrath proceeds from *malevolence,* the Divine wrath results from the principle stated above. Some appear to think that a perfectly benevolent Being can have in his nature no such thing as wrath; while others conclude, "A God all mercy, is a God unjust." These seemingly opposite opinions, however, will probably be found to be nothing

more than a dispute about words. To say an *unjust* being is at the same time *all mercy*, is a paradox that cannot bear examination.

Benevolence furnishes the means of universal happiness; and justice prescribes boundaries to guard the established system, which none are permitted to pass over. Now is there any opposition between the principle which *furnishes* the happiness, and the one which *defends* it? Do they not both flow from the same gracious disposition?

As God knew that the well-being of his creatures depended upon maintaining a regular system of moral conduct, he interposed his authority to prescribe and enforce the necessary rules of voluntary action; and this was the operation of justice. Had this not been exercised, the system of happiness would have been neglected, and left without protection; therefore the want of justice would have been a very great deficiency in goodness. How then can the conclusion be sustained, that "A God all mercy, is a God unjust?" Would it be *all mercy*, to leave the felicity of the whole universe without protection?

The view entertained by those who would exclude justice from the Divine character, appears to be, that God should furnish the means of enjoyment without any deficiency, and then let all his creatures do as they please: let them deface and mar his whole plan with impunity; and when he sees them perverting his fair creation, and turning it into a scene of confusion and

desolation, he must do nothing to restrain them! This would be like sowing good seed in a field, and then leaving it without an enclosure, to be trodden under foot, because the owner is too merciful to take care of it! When an enemy comes to destroy the growing produce, and thus to blast the harvest, he must not be arrested and bound hand and foot,—nothing must be done to interrupt or restrain him; every thing must be allowed to go to ruin; and after all is destroyed, the owner's whole possessions turned into a wilderness, and his children and servants brought to beggary and starvation, he may sit down and console himself, by reflecting on the demonstration thus given, that his character is *all mercy!*

If there be no justice exercised, on the part of our Creator, it is obvious that he can have no moral government; for what is government, but the action of authority prescribing and enforcing rules of moral conduct? The kind of *mercy* which sinners want God to exercise, is such as must possess no authority, have no law, and hold them to no responsibility. That is, they desire God to be so merciful as to patronise all ungodliness, and to furnish transgressors with an eternal heaven of sin! This is the secret which lies at the foundation of all objections to the Divine government.

Justice and judgment are, and ought to be, the foundation of the Almighty's throne; whence it is evident, that the wrath of God is always a *just* wrath, which originates in a regard to the common welfare. It may

be pretended, perhaps, that all wrath is unjust; but this contradicts the human conscience, which testifies that guilt deserves punishment. It is also refuted by the civil governments of all nations, which, however they differ in form, all agree in this, that they inflict punishment upon transgressors. Hence we see the conviction to be universal, that there is such a thing as *just wrath;* and on this basis the conclusion rests, that the wrath of God is no more contrary to his love, than the justice is from which it emanates.

But this wrath, it may be said, is too severe. It is not more severe than just, and that is, not more so than is necessary; otherwise it would follow that justice is unnecessary; a conclusion this, which none will contend for, except they wish, on the one hand, to witness the reign of tyranny, or, on the other, to return to the secret above mentioned, that sin does no harm, and therefore should be left free from all restraint and punishment.

The wrath of God is not *animosity* towards sinners; for he delights to pardon them, whenever it can be done without giving up his kingdom, and sacrificing the welfare of his unoffending subjects. The redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ was intended to open the way for the pardon of sin to be extended as far as it is possible for mercy to extend it. That is, so far as will not impair the moral system on which the common welfare depends; and beyond this, the grant of pardon would be *unmerciful.* Divine wrath, when

put into a flame, is kindled at the fountain of love. It punishes the sinner, in order either mercifully to reform him, or kindly to protect the general happiness. Even in the wonderful sufferings of redeeming love, wrath and mercy operated in perfect harmony.

> Here the whole Deity is known,
> Nor dares a creature guess,
> Which of the glories brightest shone,
> The *justice* or the *grace*.

Hence it is said that "He who was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood," and whose "name is called the Word of God," "treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (Rev. xix. 13.) And mark the astonishing combination of wrath and mercy, in the account given of him, and of his redeeming operations, in the Old Testament: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? —I that speak in *righteousness*, mighty to *save*. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine *anger*, and trample them in my *fury*, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of *vengeance* is in my heart, and the year of my *redeemed* is come. Therefore mine own arm brought *salvation* unto me, and my *fury*, it upheld me. I will tread down the people in mine *anger*, and make them drunk in my *fury*, and I will bring down

their strength to the earth. I will mention the *loving kindness* of the Lord, and his *great goodness* towards the house of Israel," &c. (Isa. lxiii. 1.) These strong expressions exhibit the harmony of justice and benevolence, and show that the work of redemption was accompanied by their combined operation. The same principles, the same harmony, the same energy, run through the whole of the Divine administration, from the beginning of the creation to eternity. There is no contradiction or variation of principle in the Supreme Being; but the action of his government operates upon individuals, according to the diversity of their characters. Our Creator is not *a double-minded* Being: *He is of one mind, and who can turn him?* His disposition is that of immutable love for the whole creation; and in all things He acts from an invariable regard to the public happiness.

SECTION VII.

Supposed Partiality of God towards Nations.

We are informed that God is "the Father of the spirits of all flesh;" that "all souls are his;" that "there is no respect of persons with God;" and that "the wisdom from above is without partiality and without hypocrisy." Whence we conclude, that there can be no motive in the Divine Mind for caprice or *favouritism.*

Indeed, we have only to inquire whether this disposition be a constituent part of a *good* or of an *evil* character, to ascertain whether it have place in the mind of our Creator. If partiality be an evil disposition, there is none of it in God; and if it be a good one, why should any man be unwilling to be an object of its influence, or to be one of its reprobates? and why is it prohibited by the wisdom that is from above?

But it may be supposed that God is partial in his treatment of nations: the Jews, for example, were his *peculiar* people, while many other nations were cast off into darkness and heathenism. How does God himself answer this objection? As follows: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil way, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." (Jer. xviii. 7.) "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but IN EVERY NATION, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts x. 34.)

God said to Abraham, "I will *bless thee*, and thou shalt *be a blessing*." So it was with Abraham's posterity: they were not chosen to be God's peculiar peo-

ple for their own sake alone, but to be a blessing to surrounding nations, that the name of God might be declared throughout all the earth, and that all nations and kindreds of the earth might be blessed in Abraham's seed. When the Jews rebelled, they were accordingly punished, not only that they might be reclaimed, but also that other nations might be instructed and admonished.

"When the nations round about were witnesses of God's judgments against Israel," says *Sherlock*, "when they forsook the Lord their God, and of their happy and prosperous state while they kept his covenant; it was a convincing proof of the power and justice of the God of Israel; especially when they should see the ten tribes utterly rooted out for their idolatry, and Judah carried captive into Babylon, and the city and temple of Jerusalem destroyed, and the land laid waste and desolate without inhabitants; the justice and power of God, in driving them out of their land, would then be as much taken notice of, as his wonderful providence in delivering them out of Egypt. And this was so publicly known, that when any such evils befel Israel, the nations round about were able to give the reason of it; *because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers.* So that the very oppression and captivity of Israel, published the supreme power and glory of the God of Israel." The same author says again, "These captivities and dispersions of Israel, especially the long captivity of Judah in Babylon, served other ends besides the punishment and the

cure of their idolatry; for into what country soever they were carried captive, they carried the KNOWLEDGE of the God of Israel along with them." (p. 365.)

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, acknowledged to Daniel, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since thou couldst reveal this secret." And upon the deliverance of the three Hebrews, the same monarch passed a decree, "That every people, nation and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other God, that can deliver after this sort." (Dan. ii. 47—iii. 28.)

When Daniel and his associates were exalted to great authority in the kingdom, who can doubt that they used their utmost influence to diffuse a knowledge of the true God among the people, which knowledge, as our Saviour informs us, is *life eternal?* King *Darius* also made a decree, "That in every dominion of his kingdom, men fear and tremble before the God of Daniel." And suppose thousands of them did so, we have a right to conclude that they were saved; for if the apostle Peter had an orthodox view of the gospel, *whosoever* in that or any other nation feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

It is delightful to have the authority of such an author as Sherlock in opposition to the gloomy doctrine of Gentile reprobation. "The Jews, and their God, and

their religion," he says, "became known over all the Roman Empire. And though the knowledge of the God of Israel did not reform Nations, yet we have reason to believe, that it made a great many private converts, who secretly forsook the idolatries of their countries, and worshipped the only true God; and some few examples of this kind, which we know, may satisfy us that there were many more.

"On the famous day of *Pentecost,* there were at Jerusalem great numbers, not only of *Jews,* but of *Proselytes* out of every nation, "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya, about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome; Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians." From whence we learn, that the dispersion of the Jews into all nations, made great numbers of Proselytes, who renounced all the Heathen Idolatries, and worshipped no other God but the God of Israel. When St. Paul preached at *Thessalonica, there consorted with Paul and Silas of the devout Greeks a great multitude.* The very name of *Greeks* proves them to be *Gentiles;* and that they were devout or worshipping *Greeks,* proves that they were the worshippers of the God of *Israel.* And almost in every place where St. Paul preached the gospel, we find great numbers of these worshipping *Gentiles.*" (Divine Providence, pp. 372, 373.)

This judicious author adds the following:—"We

must confess that we know so little of the other world, that it is impossible for us to give a particular reason of every passage of Providence, which relates to the next world. It is one very great difficulty, that since all men have immortal souls, and must be happy or miserable for ever, God should for so many ages suffer the whole world, excepting the *Jews*, to live in ignorance, and in Pagan idolatry and superstition. But then the whole difficulty is no more than this, that we know not what the condition of such men is in the other world, who lived in invincible ignorance of the true God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, in this. This we confess we do not know, but believe so well of God, that we are verily persuaded, could we see what their state is in the other world, we should see no reason to quarrel with the justness or goodness of God upon their account. Men must be very much inclined to quarrel with God, who will raise objections from what they confess they know nothing of: and yet I cannot guess, how they should know any thing of the state of ignorant Heathens in the next world, since the Scripture says nothing of it; and yet this can be known only by revelation, for we cannot look into the other world.

"The plain truth of the case is this: some men confidently affirm, that ignorant Heathens shall suffer the same condemnation which Christ has threatened against wilful infidels, and wicked Christians; and this, I confess, is a great difficulty, but it is a difficulty of their own making; and I should think it much more safe for

ourselves, and much more honourable for God, to confess our ignorance of such matters, as we have no possible way to know, than to pretend to know what we cannot know, and from thence to raise such objections as we cannot answer. We know so little in particular about the other world, that it is impossible we should be able either to satisfy ourselves or others in such matters." (Divine Providence, pp. 139, 140.)

In regard to the supposed partiality of God, in selecting the Jews to be his peculiar people, the charge is fully obviated, not only by the clear Scripture evidence that God had an impartial regard to the happiness of all mankind in that dispensation, but also by his severe treatment of the Jews themselves, when they became a nation of infidels. "The obstinate Infidelity of the Jews," says Mr. Sherlock, "who blasphemed the name, and persecuted the disciples of Christ, did in some degree hinder the progress of the Gospel among the Gentiles; but the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the miraculous preservation of the Christians, was so visible a testimony to Christianity, that the Gospel had a freer passage, and prevailed mightily in the world.

"And the dispersion of the Jews into all countries, as before it spread the knowledge of the one true God, so now it made them unwilling witnesses to Christianity, as being the visible triumph of the crucified Jesus.

"In a word, when all mankind were Idolaters, God chose the posterity of *Abraham*, to prepare men to receive the gospel, which would in time extirpate all

Pagan idolatries. When Christ was come, and the gospel preached to the world, God rejected that nation for their infidelity, and by that means gave a freer passage to the gospel among the *Gentiles;* and St. Paul intimates, that the time will come, when the sincere faith, and exemplary piety of the Christian Church shall contribute as much to the conversion of the Jews, as they formerly did to the conversion of the Gentiles; for this seems to be the sum of the apostle's reasoning, with which I shall conclude this argument. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet now have obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also not believed, that through your mercy, they also may obtain mercy; for God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. xi. 30.)" (Divine Providence, pp. 379, 380.

That all men of every nation have the privilege of obtaining future happiness, will appear from the following considerations.

1. *They all sustain the same relation to God.* He is "the Father of the spirits of all flesh," and "hath made of one blood all the nations of men, that they might feel after him, and find him; for he is not far from every one of us." What earthly father would have such an antipathy toward some of his children, as to place them in circumstances, from their birth, in which

it would not be in their power to obtain happiness? "If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" To say God is indifferent to the happiness of a large proportion of 'HIS OFFSPRING,' because they are called Jews, Mahometans or Pagans, is grossly to misrepresent his character.

2. *They all sustain the same relation to Christ.* He is called the second Adam, because in his character of Redeemer he stands at the head of the whole human family, as entirely as the first Adam did. He gave himself a ransom for all; tasted death for every man; and became the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Now is it not infinitely unworthy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to suppose him to stand at the head of the human family, as the world's Redeemer, and at the same time to place millions of mankind in circumstances from their birth, in which it is impossible for them to derive any benefit from his atonement? To call it a benefit, for them to have temporal blessings which are to convey them to inevitable perdition, is a mere burlesque and an insult to common rationality.

3. *From their relation to the Divine government as responsible agents.* Jesus Christ says, '*all nations*' shall stand before him in judgment. Then they are all accountable. And shall we say of God, that he holds millions of his creatures accountable, under circumstances which render it impossible for any one of them

to give a good account? If there be no possible course for Heathens to take that will not eventuate in their destruction, does it not follow that they are damned for being Heathens, and that the Almighty holds them accountable for the circumstances of their birth?

4. *From their state of probation.* If Pagans and Mahometans are really in a state of trial for eternity, then it is possible for them so to act their part as to receive the crown of life; otherwise we shall define a state of probation to be a state in which the souls of men are *necessarily fitted for perdition.* A state in which they are called upon either to improve a talent which they have not, or are furnished with a talent which cannot be improved. Their probation was allowed them, it should seem, not to give them a chance for their life, but only to fit and qualify them for the place of future punishment!

5. *From their capacity for truth and virtue.* "What does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah, vi. 8.) Is it not possible for Heathens to embrace so much truth, as will lead them to this line of conduct? May not a Pagan or a Mahometan be as *sincere* in his inquiries as a Christian? May he not be as *candid* in the pursuit of truth, as *earnest* in his desires after God, and as *submissive* to what he understands to be his Maker's will and authority? If so, he can have, in his degree, the very same virtues which qualify the soul of the Christian for eternal life. And the supposi-

tion that God will send men of this character to hell, because they had the disadvantage of being born in heathen lands, implies a gross and shameful misrepresentation of his character.

6. *From their immortality.* Immortal creatures have a capacity for eternal happiness or misery: and to say their Maker has placed thousands and millions of them in circumstances where future happiness is unattainable, and future misery inevitable, is to suppose either that he is indifferent to the well-being of their souls, or that he really takes pleasure in their future punishment. It is to suppose these creatures were brought into existence for the purpose of being made miserable for ever; as much so as if they had been ordained to this misery from all eternity.

It is objected, however, that all Pagans are guilty of idolatry, which God says is *the abominable thing which his soul hateth.* That all Pagans are idolaters, is taken for granted without proof. Many of them believe in one supreme God; and in approaching him through the medium of images, they may aim as sincerely to obtain his favour, as pious Roman Catholics have done, through the succeeding ages of Christendom. Heathens never heard of the ten commandments; and they have been taught from their birth, that it is right and proper to approach God through the medium of visible representations; therefore no man can prove that those of them who are sincere and fervent in their desires to please their Creator, are exposed to eternal misery for

an error which they have been taught to receive as a truth from their infancy, and which, upon the approach of gospel light, they would readily and for ever renounce.

An argument much dwelt upon in modern times, is that an admission of the possibility of Heathen salvation will damp the fervour of missionary zeal: for why contribute our money, and send our missionaries to carry the gospel to the Heathens, if they can be saved without it? This argument is occasionally used even by *Methodists;* and some of them, there is cause to apprehend, are disposed to give up their original testimony, and to abandon the doctrines of their *Wesley* and *Fletcher*, for the sake of exciting and supporting missionary zeal. But the whole plausibility of this reasoning rests upon false assumptions.

First, it supposes that the design of preaching the gospel, is *to place men in a state of probation.* Persons in a state of trial for eternity have power so to acquit themselves as to be accepted and approved of their Maker, or they have not; if they have *not*, it is a sham trial, and they are held to their accountability by despotic power; if they *have*, then Heathens may become the subjects of future happiness, or otherwise they *are not in a state of probation.* If the latter be their true condition, then our missionaries go to them with the high prerogative of essentially altering their moral relation to Almighty God, and of exercising towards them

that benevolence which, it should seem, their Maker had withheld from them for so many generations.

Secondly, it supposes that the design of carrying the gospel to the Heathens, is *to deliver them from a state of absolute reprobation.* Millions of them, indeed the whole population, it is supposed, have through a succession of centuries gone unavoidably to perdition. There was no period of their lives, from birth until death, in which it was in their power to escape hell. They might as justly have been ordained to hell from everlasting; for this would make no conceivable alteration either in its bearing upon their destiny, or upon the character of their Creator. Methodists may be assured that they will find no alternative, but either to embrace the whole system of free wrath, or to relinquish the hypothesis of Heathen reprobation.

Thirdly, it supposes that when men have an amount of religious knowledge which puts them in the lowest degree of salvation, the gospel leaves them there;—that it is no part of its design, or an unimportant one, to lead them on to higher knowledge, and to higher attainments, that they "may receive a FULL reward." For suppose Heathens, by obeying the light they have, may attain to a low degree of salvation, if the blaze of gospel truth would lead them on from grace to grace, and from glory to glory, whereby they would attain immensely greater heights of happiness in heaven, will not this be sufficient to excite the full glow of missionary zeal? If not, then there can be no room for the exercise of such

zeal in Christendom, in order to build up believers in their most holy faith. Christians may all continue in a low state of religion to the end of life, provided only that they have enough barely to escape hell. For if they can be *saved* with their present attainments, what need of missionary zeal to call them into any higher degrees of "glory and virtue," any more than to furnish these advantages to Heathens?

Fourthly, the argument assumes, that it is no design of the Gospel, or an unimportant one, to *warn*, *exhort*, and "*persuade men*" to be saved: for if there is no need of ministerial zeal, in preaching the gospel to the Heathens, because they already have salvation within their reach, then it is equally unnecessary to continue instant in season, and out of season, in preaching the gospel to our own countrymen; because they already have salvation within their reach. They have their Bibles, and possess religious knowledge enough to place them in a state of probation: they may be saved if they will: therefore let our gospel zeal die away; for there is no necessity for it. This argument is as conclusive in its application to all Christendom, as it is in its application to the Heathen world.

Fifthly, it seems to assume, that all missionary zeal to carry the gospel to the Heathen world, is so pure, and so important, that hardly any sacrifices are too great for us to make, in order to sustain it. If, however, we are called upon sentimentally to devote millions of our fellow-creatures to unavoidable destruction,

and thereby to give up all the holy attributes of our Creator, this is too great a sacrifice to be made in support of missionary zeal; and it may be doubted whether a zeal derived from such a source is altogether so pure, as many seem desirous to have us to take for granted.

Why are the Heathens of our own country so deplorably overlooked and neglected?

Mr. Jay says, "In vain has the Redeemer of the world given the command to preach the gospel to every creature; his professed disciples in the slave states have issued a counter order; and as we have already seen, have by their laws, incapacitated 2,000,000 of their fellow-men from complying with the injunction, "search the Scriptures." Not only are the slaves debarred from reading the wonderful things of God—they are practically prevented with a few exceptions from even *hearing* of them. There are in the bosom of our country TWO MILLIONS of human beings, who, in consequence of our laws, are in a state of HEATHENISM. In 1831, the Rev. Charles C. Jones preached a sermon before two associations of planters in Georgia. This sermon is before us, and we quote from it.

"Generally speaking they (the slaves) appear to us to be without God and without hope in the world, a NATION OF HEATHENS in our very midst.—We cannot cry out against the Papists for withholding the scriptures from the common people, and keeping them in ignorance of the way of life; for we *withhold* the Bible

from our servants, and *keep* them in ignorance of it, while we *will* not use the means to have it read and explained to them."

On the 5th of December 1833, a committee of the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, to whom was referred the subject of the religious instruction of the coloured population, made a report which has been published, and in which this language is used.

"Who would credit it, that in these years of revival and benevolent effort, in this Christian republic, there are over TWO MILLIONS of human beings in the condition of HEATHEN, and in some respects in a worse condition. From long continued and close observation, we believe that their moral and religious condition is such that they may justly be considered the HEATHEN of this Christian country, and will bear comparison with heathen in any country in the world. The negroes are destitute of the gospel, and *ever will be under the present state of things.*"

In a late number of the Charleston (S. C.) Observer, a correspondent remarked: "Let us establish missionaries among our own negroes, who, in view of religious knowledge, are as debasingly ignorant as any one on the coast of Africa; for I hazard the assertion, that through the bounds of our Synod, there are at least one hundred thousand slaves, speaking the same language as ourselves, who never *heard* of the plan of salvation by a Redeemer." (Jay's Inquiry, pp. 136, &c.)

Now shall all our Christian sympathies be frozen up—

shall the churches of our land remain in profound *silence*, in regard to the perishing condition of the two millions of heathens in our own country, while we employ benevolent missionary agents to solicit contributions to send the gospel to the heathens of the other hemisphere? Our missionary zeal must be purified from such glaring inconsistency, before we can reasonably expect to make a very extensive and favourable impression upon the minds of either Jews or Gentiles.

But what is most astonishing, we are called upon to believe that the two millions of heathens in our country, by being kept from a knowledge of the gospel by Republican Christians, are thereby consigned to inevitable reprobation, and to the miseries of an endless hell. A writer in the Anti-slavery Magazine, calls slavery "A legalized system of oppression, which consigns millions of God's children to insufferable wrongs and unutterable misery in this world, and to agony and despair in the future." (Anti-slavery Magazine, vol. II. No. 1. p. 52.) Hence it would appear, that because these poor creatures are compelled to endure "insufferable wrongs and unutterable misery in this world," their Maker therefore takes the matter up after they are dead, and keeps them in "agony and despair" to all eternity! This seems to imply, that however great may be the despotism and tyranny of mankind, the Almighty Lord of nature resolves to keep himself at the head of the list, as the greatest tyrant of all.

We contend, that those neglected negroes either have

it in their power to obtain their Maker's final favour, or otherwise they are not in a state of probation at all; and consequently are not exposed to "agony and despair" in a future state.

Our *last* though not least objection to the hypothesis before us, is that it assumes for Protestant clergymen one of the worst and most presumptuous claims of popery. Roman Catholics tell us, that "there is no salvation out of the church," and that the grace of salvation can only be conveyed from the church through the hands of her ministry: Heretics and Heathens must all be damned, except they receive salvation *through this channel exclusively.* Now Protestants, who hold the doctrine which we here oppose, evidently set up the same identical claim: they say that Heathens cannot be saved, except they receive salvation through the hand of our missionaries, and missionary societies.

If these people cannot be instructed unto salvation in any other way, than through our instrumentality, it must be either because God has *no power* to save them in any other way, or because he has *no right* to do it, or because he has *no will* to do it. It will peradventure be urged, that though God possesses both the power and the right to save the Heathens through other mediums of illumination, yet it is not his will; for he has engaged or pledged himself not to save them except through our ministrations; which is the identical claim of the Romish priesthood, that God has pledged himself to them, that salvation shall not flow either to Heretics

or Heathens, except through the medium of their sanctified authority.

But why should the great Sovereign of the world thus restrict himself, and give the power of salvation out of his own hands? May he not do what he will with his own? Shall our eye be evil because he is good? Not only the power of salvation, but the power of judgment also, according to this hypothesis, appears to be given out of his hands; for if our missionaries have the prerogative of putting men into a state of probation, the Almighty would seem to be dependent on them for his authority to judge the Heathen world in righteousness.

Such, and more, are the consequences resulting from the favourite hypothesis of modern times, that the whole Heathen world have been kept in life for centuries, for the simple purpose of being indiscriminately consigned to the miseries of an endless hell.

Alas, for poor sectarian, bigoted man! if he had the prerogative to wield the thunders of eternity, what millions would by wholesale be hurried quickly into unavoidable and eternal ruin! What a spectacle, to see Jews damn all Gentiles—Gentiles damn all Jews—Roman Catholics damn all Protestants—and Protestants damn all Roman Catholics! Let heaven and earth be glad, and shout for joy, that "The Lord is Judge himself." Let the redeemed millions of heaven say Alleluia, and let them repeat the triumphant exclamation, Alleluia, that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!

and that he has not committed the eternal destiny of any creature to the sovereign decision of human selfishness and sectarian bigotry.

SECTION VIII.

Imaginary Decrees of God in reference to Individuals.

That Almighty God has formed *decrees*, is too manifest to be reasonably doubted. The plan of Creation may be called a system of decrees; the plan of Redemption, another; the plan of Providence, a third; and the plan of moral government, a fourth. Every *precept* of God may be called a decree; and so may every *promise*, and every *threatening*.

But has he formed particular decrees, in regard to mankind? Without question he has. He has decreed, for example, that every man shall be governed as a free agent; that it shall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not; that every one of us shall give an account of himself to God; and that the world shall be judged in righteousness.

But the supposition that God has decreed the eternal happiness of some men, and the eternal misery of others, without regard to their actions, or by predestinating those actions, appears to be an entire misrepresentation of his whole character.

What *sincerity* is there in our Maker's revealed will, if he has a *secret will* which renders the former only an appearance of justly governing and judging moral agents, without doing so in reality? The whole Bible has the appearance of an address to free agents; being filled up with invitations, commands, promises, threatenings, persuasions, arguments and expostulations. Do not all these modes of address look like an appeal to us as creatures whose character and destiny are to be fixed by our own unconstrained volitions? And is not all this a mere deception, if our character and destiny have been previously fixed by an unconditional and immutable decree? It is not necessary to detain the reader, by showing the inconsistency of this notion of decrees with each particular attribute of God; because it is evident that a being destitute of *sincerity*, can possess no good attribute whatever. The two prominent traits of the devil's character are said to be deceit and malevolence: he is a *liar*, and he is a *murderer*.

Now if the Almighty predetermined that certain angels and men should be miserable in hell for ever, either by purposing to send them there without regard to their works, or by predestinating their actions, how would this differ from his placing them in hell at the first moment of their existence? Would not such a procedure evince malevolence of disposition? And is not malevolence the spirit of a murderer? To what purpose would creatures, thus destined, have a probation given them, except to make a *show* of just dealing and a righteous

administration, when the *reality* was wanting? If such questions alarm us, let us draw back with horror from imputations upon our Maker which would despoil him of all his loveliness, and deprive mankind of all religious hope and consolation.

By what arguments is this notion of eternal decrees sustained? The principal arguments which have come under our notice are the following:

First, It is supposed that *the good pleasure of the divine will* requires that all things should be thus decreed. And would it be a pleasant prospect to our Creator—*a pleasure to his will,*—to see millions of his own creatures in hopeless and endless misery, as the result of an absolute decree of his own, which either punished them without regard to their works, or predestinated a course of actions which should fit them for this misery? The Lord our God appeals to his own life, that *he has no pleasure* in the death of the wicked; but that *he has pleasure* in seeing the wicked man turn from his evil way that he may live.

Secondly, it is supposed that the *divine sovereignty* requires such a procedure; inasmuch as God has a right to do what he will with his own. But would it be right for him to place all men and angels in hell at their first existence, and punish them without intermission and without end, because they are his own? If this be the sovereignty of a good Being, by what marks and characteristics will it be distinguished from the sovereignty of a Tyrant? It is evident, if the argument be conclusive

in regard to any one creature of God, it will equally conclude against them all; for they are all alike his own, and of course could all alike be punished in virtue of the same sovereignty.

Thirdly, it has been supposed that *divine justice* requires that there should be reprobates; for if all creatures were free, they might all do right, and there would be no hell; and if there be no hell, justice will have no place in which to display itself. And pray, is there not as much justice in heaven, as there is in hell? Is JUSTICE such a corrupt and evil principle, that there is no room for it in heaven? Let us suppose for a moment, that an unjust being should wish to make a display of his injustice, how would it be possible for him to do it more effectually than by ordaining sin, that he might thereby have a plausible pretence for placing creatures in extreme torment, in order to keep them there without intermission and without end? If this would be a perfect display both of *justice* and *injustice*, how is the one to be distinguished from the other?

Fourthly, it has been supposed that the eternal decrees above mentioned, are required by the *wisdom* of God; inasmuch as it is folly in any being to operate *without a plan.*

Now in regard to the operations of a superintending mind, two kinds of plan are to be distinctly considered: one is the plan of controlling and regulating a system of *machinery;* the other is the plan of governing a kingdom or community of moral agents. To the machinery,

force is applied in various directions, according to the design of the superintendent; to the subjects of a moral government *commands*, *promises*, and *threatenings*, are given; because the wise design of the Ruler is to govern them by motives, and not by mechanical impulse. Shall it be said of the ruler of a kingdom or commonwealth, that he acts without a plan, because he does not decree and make inevitable every particular action of those under his administration? According to this view, there is no such thing as a wise government upon earth: they are all founded in folly, for want of effectual decrees that shall fix an unbroken chain of destiny for all the actions of each individual.

Query. Does it not require more wisdom to govern a society of free agents, than to govern a complicated machine, such as a water-mill, a cotton factory, or a steam-boat? And has not God wisdom enough to form a plan of governing free agents, without despoiling them of their liberty, by such a system of decrees? Alas! this notion of predestination evidently supposes there is such a *want of wisdom* in the Almighty, that he cannot form a plan of governing the intelligent universe, without first binding them all, that he may take the whole action entirely into his own hands.

It is urged, fifthly, that the decrees of God under consideration, are required *by his fore-knowledge.*

Now in order to form correct views of this matter, we must carefully avoid confounding things which in their own nature are essentially different. What is a

decree? It is *a voluntary purpose of the will.* What is *knowledge?* It is *the discernment of the understanding.* Whether we speak of *fore?* or *after*, or *present* knowledge, its nature is the same: a mere *mental survey*, taking cognizance of truth and fact, in regard to existence, qualities, relations, and operations. Past knowledge we call *remembrance;* present knowledge, *perception* or *discernment;* and a knowledge of the future, *foreknowledge* or *prescience.* The different parts of time, *past*, *present*, and *future*, make no change whatever in the nature of knowledge; and a *prescience* of future events has no other kind of connection with the events themselves, than *remembrance* has with past events.

The proposition, that the decrees of God are involved in his foreknowledge, must mean one of these three things: either 1. that God decrees future events, *in order to know them;* or 2. that he decrees them, *because he knows them;* or 3. that *his knowledge itself brings them to pass of necessity.*

In regard to the first, that God decrees future events *in order to know them*, it supposes that His knowledge, like our own, is *acquired* by voluntary application: his will must be exerted, in forming decrees of what is to be done, before he can have a knowledge of any thing! Then does it not follow, that without a due exercise of his voluntary powers, in forming a train of absolute purposes and decrees, he must have remained in eternal ignorance of every thing? If God can know nothing,

but in virtue of first arranging it by his decree, it is evident that the decree itself must be formed in the dark, without any intelligence to discern a reason why one kind of a decree should be resolved upon, rather than another.

We are conscious that we can foreknow, with a high degree of *probability*, what our fellow-men will do, when at the same time we do not form any decree, nor exert any power whatever to influence their actions. Then cannot our Creator foreknow with *certainty* the unconstrained actions of his creatures? This is unquestionably more honourable to the Divine understanding, than to suppose God can foreknow nothing without resolving to bring it to pass himself.

As to the second supposition, that God decrees all things *because* he fore-knows them;—we may simply ask, if he already knows they will come to pass, why need he decree them, in order to their accomplishment? He may fore-know what other agents will do under given circumstances, and may decree to vary the circumstances, in order to prevent their doing what they otherwise would do; but when he fore-sees what they will do, and does not intend to prevent it, a decree to bring it to pass by his own power, would appear to be a perfect *superfluity*, to say the least of it. As to the saying which we sometimes hear, that *God decrees to permit certain events*, we have no objection to it; because it means nothing more nor less than this, that He purposes not to hinder them by superior power.

That God fore-knows with certainty what men will do under given circumstances, which yet they do not perform, in consequence of a change of those circumstances, is evident from 1 Sam. xxiii. 10, &c. "Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? And the Lord said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up. Then David and his men arose and departed out of Keilah. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbare to go forth." Who can doubt the absolute certainty of the Divine fore-knowledge, that Saul would have gone to Keilah and that its inhabitants would have delivered up David, had he continued in their city? Yet by a change of the circumstances, Saul did not come down, and the men of Keilah did not deliver David into his hands. David appears not to have had any suspicion that the fore-knowledge of God had any influence upon the actions of free agents; otherwise he would have folded his hands in despair, and have made no attempt to make his escape, because of his conviction that the expressed fore-knowledge of God had fixed his destiny inevitably.

This divine attribute of God, whereby he foresees what his creatures will do under given circumstances,

with complete power in his own hands to vary the circumstances, and thereby to vary their conduct, without interrupting their agency, is doubtless of immense importance in his universal and eternal administration. This view of the matter may illustrate Prov. xxi. 1. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will." Also Psalm cxlvi. 9. "The way of the wicked he turneth upside down."

We will now examine the third supposition, *that foreknowledge itself brings all events to pass of necessity.* Let the matter be stated fairly. It is supposed to be admitted on all hands, that the knowledge of God is not *acquired* by the exercise of his will; but that it is so perfect in his infinite understanding, as to be incapable of either increase or diminution. That from the perfection of his mind he discerns, or knows, all things past, present, and to come, without the possibility of mistake or of being ignorant of any thing. And is there something in the nature of this knowledge, which binds all events in a fixed and absolute necessity? If so, all agency is at an end; and God, fore-knowing his own future actions with as much certainty as he knows the future actions of any other being, is for ever bound in the same fatal chains of necessity, and possesses not the attribute of *power*, in the smallest conceivable degree. If so, he never made the world, only as necessity compelled his action. He is not the giver of life to us, if the above hypothesis be true; for our life arose out of

necessity, and he could not hinder us from living. On this supposition he cannot be regarded as a benefactor; for it was never in his power to withhold any benefit which we have received. We cannot trust to him for protection, or for any good thing in future; because both God and man must be dependent on necessity alone for every enjoyment, and for every prospect. On this supposition, God can do no more for us, than we can do for him: for his infinite knowledge, of which he cannot dispossess himself, fixes him and the whole universe with him in a fatal and absolute destiny, which can never be broken. It is needless to pursue the matter any further; for it is perfectly obvious that the hypothesis from which these consequences follow, would eclipse the glory of the universe, and would land us in a system not one tittle better than atheism.

And what proof have we, that fore-knowledge, the mere exercise of a mind in mental discernment, has any possible influence upon the actions of a free agent? Suppose I now see a man sowing seed in his field;—and suppose I have the capacity to foresee, with equal certainty, that he will employ himself in the same business to-morrow;—will my *fore knowledge* have any other influence upon his actions of to-morrow, than my *present knowledge* has upon his actions of to-day? Will he not be as perfectly free as he would be, if I and every other being in existence were entirely ignorant of the manner in which he would employ himself? If I foresee that a man will walk to-morrow, this does not make

his action *necessary;* and my certainty of the event depends upon the goodness of my eyes, which are so good, that I can see a *free* action as readily as a *necessary* one. In like manner, the *certainty* of our Maker's foresight of an action depends upon the perfection of his intelligence, which is so perfect, that he can foresee a *free* action as readily as a *necessary* one. But if you foresee it as *certain*, continues the objector, then *it could not be otherwise.* As well might he say, if I now *certainly* see a man walking, it is not in his power to stand still. It is indeed impossible for me to *see it*, and *not to see it*, at the same time; and equally impossible for a man *to walk*, and *not to walk*, at the same time; but infallible foresight is founded, not upon the fact that a man *cannot* change his course of action, but upon a perfect discernment that *he will not.* The foresight of our Maker is *certain* that a man will *act freely;* that the wicked man *can*, but *will not*, omit his wicked actions. Our Creator knows that if it were possible for Him to look away from the world, and not to foresee the future actions of men for the space of one year, men would not act any more freely and voluntarily during that year, than they do at the present time.

The inquiring mind wishes to pursue this subject a little further. Though the fore-knowledge of God may have no immediate influence upon the actions of creatures, yet may we not suppose it will have an immediate influence upon his own actions, with regard to them? It cannot be doubted, that his perfect foresight

of the actions of free agents, and how they would act under certain trains of circumstances, regulates his voluntary administration, in controlling, checking, restraining, and sometimes entirely *preventing* the actions which men would otherwise perform: not, however, by taking away their agency, but by varying the circumstances by which they may be surrounded.

But if God foresaw all the wickedness and misery of mankind, why did he not prevent it, by cutting off the first guilty pair, that the earth might not be peopled with such a corrupt and abandoned race of beings? Doubtless because, from his vast survey through immensity and eternity, he foresaw that far more good than evil would ultimately result from this course of providence. His fore-knowledge is with himself alone, and enables him to counteract evil, and to form the most efficient plans for promoting virtue and happiness.

For the sake of illustration, let us suppose the father of a family to live on an island by himself, and that his children live on a distant continent, over whose actions he has no manner of control: let us suppose this father to be endowed with a perfect and infallible foreknowledge of all the actions his children will perform to the end of life: is it not obvious that his knowledge could have no more influence upon their liberty, than the most entire ignorance would have? Their actions would be equally free, whether known or unknown, and equally *certain* also. The prescience of the father would ena-

ble him to *know* the certainty of his children's actions, but would not *make* them any more certain than they would be, if he were ignorant of the whole matter. Whatever a man will do, he *certainly* will do; for to deny this is to say he *will* do it, and *will not* do it, at the same time; and the *certainty* of it is the same, whether foreknown by any being, or unforeknown.

Now in what respect does the Divine fore-knowledge differ from the case supposed? It differs in this only, that God has fore-knowledge of what creatures would do under certain circumstances, and what they will do upon a change of those circumstances; and has power to control them in any manner he pleases. Hence all the influence this knowledge can have is upon his own Mind; and it will doubtless influence Him so to arrange his providence and government, as will operate in the best manner possible, to promote holiness and happiness, and consequently to diminish sin and misery, throughout his whole empire.

Fore-knowledge has therefore no manner of influence either on the *necessity* or *certainty* of future events. There must be a volition of will, or an actual exertion of power, on the part of the Almighty, to make the future actions of men or angels certain; and when he omits the exercise of such power, their future actions are made certain by their own agency, and by no other cause whatever. While God knows what future actions are certain, he knows equally that he himself does

nothing to *make* them certain, except that he leaves his creatures to the freedom of their own will.

If we consider the Divine prospects of futurity—the vast results which God sees will be produced by his providence and grace before the end of the world, together with their consequences through immensity and eternity—we shall have cause to acknowledge that our gloomy objections arise from our own ignorance, and not from any deficiency in either the wisdom or benevolence of our Heavenly Father's dispensations. Clouds and darkness are round about him, whereby our vision is greatly circumscribed; but He sits above the clouds, and above the darkness, and foresees vast developements of wisdom, and glory, and goodness, which have never entered into our hearts to conceive.

SECTION IX.

Causes of future punishment.

To say that God will punish creatures in a future state for no reason, or for any other than good and sufficient reasons, is to misrepresent his character.

Some appear to think it is enough for us to know that he says he *will do it;* and that it is presumptuous for us to inquire into the reasons of the Divine conduct. But if so, how is it possible for us to know whether God deserves our love and confidence or not? And if we

cannot know this, how can we love him, or trust him, or reverence, adore, and worship him? We might be frightened to obey him, from the dread of future punishment; but there would be no *principle* in this obedience; nor would it be accompanied with any rational attachment either to the law or to the lawgiver. The mere apprehension of future wrath may excite the attention of the mind, and rouse the stupid sinner to consideration; but he must be brought to have such views of God as will produce reverence and love, before he can be accepted of God, or be qualified for the kingdom of heaven.

The uniform testimony of the Bible is that God will punish men for having *done wrong*, when they ought to have *done right*. "Say ye to the RIGHTEOUS, that it shall be well with him; wo unto the WICKED! it shall be ill with him." (Isa. iii. 10.) "The Lord knoweth the UPRIGHT, and their inheritance shall be for ever. But the WICKED shall perish, and into smoke shall they consume away." (Ps. xxxvii. 18.) "The RIGHTEOUS shall flourish like the palm-tree;—to show that THE LORD IS UPRIGHT, and there is NO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IN HIM." (Ps. xcii. 12, 15.) "The Lord loveth the RIGHTEOUS; but the way of the WICKED he turneth upside down." (Ps. cxlvi. 8, 9.) "Then shall ye discern between the RIGHTEOUS and the WICKED; between him that SERVETH GOD, and him that SERVETH HIM NOT." (Mal. iii. 18.) "The Son of man shall gather out of his kingdom all things that OFFEND, and them which DO INIQUITY;—Then

shall THE RIGHTEOUS shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. xiii. 41. 43.) "All that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have DONE GOOD, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have DONE EVIL, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John, v. 28, 29.) "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive according to that HE HATH DONE, whether it be GOOD OR BAD." (2 Cor. v. 10.)

It would be easy to multiply quotations of the above description, by scores and by hundreds. And what do they prove? They prove it to be the constant and unequivocal testimony of God, throughout the whole of his revelation, that he will deal with men in a future state, not according to their *name*, or *colour*, or *nation*, or *party*, or *creed;* but according to the reality of their GOOD OR EVIL CHARACTER.

From this general statement, we may deduce the three following conclusions:

First, that men will not be condemned in a future state for any other *ignorance* than that which *disregards* the work of the Lord, and *will not consider* the operation of his hand.

If men deserve hell for ignorance that does not result from any delinquency of principle, or neglect of right conduct, all infants, idiots, and even beasts, birds and fishes, would equally deserve the same fate.

A passage of the prophet Hosea has been often quoted, to prove that men are to be punished in a future state

for mere ignorance: *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* (Hosea, iv. 6.) It seems to be supposed that the Lord was here speaking of a mere want of instruction; whereas the chapter commences thus: "The Lord hath a *controversy* with the *inhabitants* of the land, because there is *no truth*, nor *mercy*, nor *knowledge of God*, in the land. By *swearing*, and *lying*, and *killing*, and *stealing*, and committing *adultery*, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." Did they lack knowledge, merely because their teachers neglected to instruct them? So far from it, that the prophet says (verse 4.) 'yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for *this people* are they that *strive with the priest.* Therefore shalt thou fall, and the prophet also shall fall with thee, and I will destroy thy mother.' It then follows, 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;' but what was the cause of this lack? In the very same verse we are told what it was: "Because thou hast REJECTED knowledge, I will reject thee: seeing thou hast FORGOTTEN the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. As they were increased, so *they sinned against me;* therefore will I change their glory into shame. And there shall be *like people, like priest:* and I will punish them for *their ways*, and reward them *their doings:* because they have *left off to take heed to the Lord.*" Two other reasons are immediately given, why they *lacked knowledge:* the first is, (verse 11.) "Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, *take away the heart.*" The second is, "My *people ask counsel at their stocks,*

and *their staff declareth unto them:* for the spirit of whoredoms *hath caused them to err*, and *they have gone from under their God.* THEREFORE the people that doth not understand shall fall." (Verse 14.)

These are the reasons why people are condemned for their ignorance; to which we may add the following: "The ox knoweth his owner—but Israel doth NOT KNOW, my people doth NOT CONSIDER." (Isa. i. 2.) "Wo unto them—they REGARD NOT the work of the Lord, NEITHER CONSIDER the operation of his hands." (Isa. v. 12.) "How long, ye simple ones, will ye LOVE SIMPLICITY, and the scorners DELIGHT IN THEIR SCORNING, and FOOLS HATE KNOWLEDGE!" (Prov. i. 22.) "Because I have CALLED, and ye REFUSED; but ye have *set at nought all my counsel*, and would *none of my reproof;* I also will laugh at your calamity;—for that they HATED KNOWLEDGE, and did NOT CHOOSE the fear of the Lord." (Verse 24—29.) "They say unto God, Depart from us; for we DESIRE NOT the KNOWLEDGE of thy ways." (Job xxi. 14.) "Even as they *did not like to retain God in their knowledge*, God gave them over to a reprobate mind." (Rom. i. 28.)

Secondly, the only kind of error, heresy, or unbelief for which men will be condemned in a future state, is "an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

How much truth is a man required to believe, in order to his salvation? So much exactly as he is able to find, by an humble and candid attention to his Maker's in-

structions. On what authority is a man required to believe? On the authority of God alone. For any error or mistake into which a man may fall from other causes than inattention or want of candour, he is inculpable; and to say God will punish any one eternally for involuntary errors, is to bring an impeachment against the perfection of his whole character. It supposes he will condemn a man for not being as infallible as himself; and why not as well condemn every one that refuses or neglects to be as *omnipresent* or as *almighty* as God himself is?

But when God gives a revelation to his creatures, does he not justly require their faith in the *whole* of it? He justly requires them to believe that the whole of it is true; and this is the faith of every honest Christian: he believes the revelation of his God contains truth and nothing else; and he embraces all the particulars in detail, so far as a persevering and candid attention enables him to apprehend them. It is the duty of every man to exercise his mental faculties in this way; and to say any one who does so is exposed to future wrath for his errors, is manifestly to suppose him chargeable with guilt for a right exercise of his mental faculties, or otherwise for not exercising faculties which he never had.

But it may be said that his guilt results from his neglect to come to an *infallible tribunal*, to be informed what is truth. And can any man or any tribunal be found on earth, that is more infallible than God? If

God, who is infallible, has told us what is truth, can any human tribunal tell it in better language? If we have mistaken His meaning, will we not be as likely to mistake theirs also? or can they strengthen our faculties and enlighten the eyes of our understanding, better than the Almighty can do it? If they are to think and believe for us, will it not follow that they must stand in our place, and be justified or condemned for us in the day of judgment?

These men are remarkable for urging the obligation to believe *all* the truths of revelation, and *each one* of them in particular. And why? For the very interesting reason, that they may have the privilege of telling us every particular item that we are to believe. They pretend that God has given them this prerogative, because there was no other way to keep us sound in the faith. Now if we leave God's infallible instructions, to yield ourselves to theirs, it must be for one or more of these reasons: either 1. that they know better than God; or 2. that they can speak more *intelligibly* than he; or 3. that they can *assist our understandings* better; or 4. that they have *more authority* in these matters, than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They will admit, however, that all truth comes from God; but they contend that he has appointed that it shall all come through their hands, and through no other channel whatsoever. But why should God restrict himself in this manner? Why should he not hold the reins in his own hands, and reserve to himself the privilege

of doing what he will with his own? Is thine eye evil because he is good?

What is the kind of unbelief for which men will be condemned, according to the Scriptures? It is the following. "How can ye believe, which *receive honour one of another*, and *seek not* the honour that cometh from God only?" (John v. 44.) "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *abode not in the truth*, because there is no truth in him. And *because I tell you the truth*, ye believe me not." (John viii. 44.) "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both SEEN AND HATED both ME and MY FATHER." (John xv. 24.) "Behold, ye DESPISERS, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your day, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." (Acts xiii. 41.) "Because they RECEIVE NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, that they might be saved. And FOR THIS CAUSE God shall send them strong delusion, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but HAD PLEASURE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS." (2 Thes. ii. 10.) "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF, IN DEPARTING FROM THE LIVING GOD." (Heb. iii. 12.)

Thirdly, men will not be punished in a future state for any other kind or number of sins, than such as are settled into a character of malignant hostility against God, and which the sinner carries with him into eter-

nity. If the wicked man will turn from his evil way, "Our God will abundantly pardon," even though his sins "have been as scarlet, or red like crimson." It is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the chief of sinners; and thousands, such as king David and Saul of Tarsus, will never be punished in the future world for any of their transgressions. Let it be particularly noted and borne in mind, therefore, that no man will be damned merely for having been a sinner; but for obstinately finishing his life in a state of confirmed enmity against God, and consequently against society, and against all social happiness. None are sent to hell but those who are fit for nothing else, and whose character and society would be worse than a nuisance in any other region of the universe.

In short, there are no other causes of future punishment, than such as constitute an essentially wicked character. Ignorance that is *wilful*, error imbibed from a *corrupt prejudice* against the truth, and disobedience that is *obstinate, impenitent* and *unyielding*—these are the causes of Divine wrath, and not any opinion that is honestly entertained, merely because it may be branded as *heresy* by the sanctimonious decrees of ecclesiastical power; nor any want of conformity to rites and ceremonies, and other sectarian observances, which are too often fondly added to the essential demands of gospel morality.

The apostle Paul says a heretic is one that *is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.* (Tit.

iii. 10, 11.) That is, a man who uncandidly does violence to truth, and is convicted in his own conscience that he is guilty of a dishonest exercise of his mental faculties. In the dark regions of infallibility, it is not improbable that *truth* has been branded with the charge of heresy, oftener than *error;* but in a future state all will be made clear, because *God is judge himself*, and will not surrender the right of judgment, or the destiny of the souls that he has made, to the decision of ecclesiastical tribunals.

SECTION X.

Ultimate ends of future punishment.

When it is said men will be punished for their evil deeds, another question follows: namely, *why must men be punished for doing wrong?* A process so fearfully solemn, is doubtless based upon very weighty and sufficient reasons. If it be said, we ought not to inquire into the reasons of future punishment, then it will follow, that *we ought to be ignorant* of that which has a direct relation to the character of God, and which involves the essential interests of his whole intelligent creation. It supposes that our Maker's judicial actions cannot bear examination, and that his glory can be sustained and vindicated in no other way than by keeping the principles of his government in the dark. It may be

thought, perhaps, that we ought so to revere his Divine Majesty, as to admit that he has perfect authority to punish his creatures for any secret reasons he may adopt, or for no reason whatever, except the pleasure of his own will; but this seems to imply an obligation on our part, to acknowledge that he is too *great* to be *good*, and his authority too *high* to be *just* and *right*. Is there any *Majesty* above *Goodness?* Is there any *authority* above *justice?* We confidently appeal to the whole Bible, that the uniform demand of God upon mankind, is to believe that he *is just*, and not that he is *above justice*—that he *is good*, and not that his majesty soars *above goodness*.

It is not to be doubted that the Almighty may have reasons for many acts of his providence that are far beyond our comprehension; but so far as he has given us the means of knowledge, it is our duty to use them, in order to acquire as adequate views of his divine government as we can; and the fear of being wise above what is written, should not influence us to neglect to examine carefully the import of what is written, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and drawing conclusions from premises furnished in the book of Divine revelation.

Axiom.

"Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, I have NO PLEASURE in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.)

Hence we conclude, that to afford pleasure to the mind of the Almighty, is not an ultimate end of future punishment.

Nor is it to afford pleasure to the minds of his children in heaven; for they being partakers of the divine nature, have consequently no more pleasure in the death of the wicked, than God himself has.

Whence it follows, that, on some ground or other, the punishment of the wicked is morally NECESSARY, and if this necessity for the measure did not exist, such punishment would not be inflicted upon them.

For any intelligent mind to be gratified, or to have pleasure, in seeing another in misery, or inflicting it on him, when there is no necessity for it, is what we call *cruelty, tyranny, despotism.* It is probably the very worst trait there is in the character of the devil.

For any person to have pleasure in the misery of another, because the other has injured him, when there is no other necessity for punishment, than merely to afford pleasure to the mind of the injured person, is the spirit of *revenge* or *retaliation.* This disposition is not in God, nor in any one of his children on earth or in heaven.

God himself "delighteth in mercy." He is "abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him." The Son of God, when suffering under the most enormous wrongs that were ever perpetrated under heaven, said,

"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do;" and to all his disciples he had previously said, "Be ye merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful." The disposition of revenge, therefore, has no place in heaven, nor in the minds of those who are on their way to heaven.

The end of punishment must consequently be one or more of the following reasons, or all of them together: either 1. to guard and protect happiness; or 2. to diminish misery; or 3. to prevent a greater evil, or to keep misery from being augmented.

Its tendency to guard happiness is two-fold: first, to put it out of the power of evil beings to disturb the felicity of the upright; and secondly, to influence the latter to avoid such courses as would involve themselves in misery.

All experience shows that wicked beings seek their gratification in doing mischief; that is, in pursuing a course of action which will destroy the happiness of others. When they are arrested by the hand of justice, and deprived of their liberty, this is to take away their power of doing harm, in order to protect the happiness of those whose rights and enjoyments they would otherwise violate and destroy. Are not divine penalties inflicted for the same purpose?

The apostle John, in describing a monster of wickedness, says, "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and in her was found the blood of prophets, and of

saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." (Rev. xvii. 6—xviii. 24.) In verse 20th it is said, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her." Accordingly, as we are informed in the next chapter, "After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for TRUE and RIGHTEOUS are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, ALLELUIA; FOR THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH."

Here all heaven appears in exultation, because the high administration of Almighty God is able to PROTECT them from those malignant beings, whose ravages, if unrestrained, would seriously interrupt if not utterly destroy the happiness of all created intelligences.

To suppose holy angels and saints triumphing in this manner, on account of the pleasure it gave them to see their fellow-creatures in torment, would be, if I mistake not, to reproach and to slander all heaven. Their joy arose, not from the misery of others, but from the prospect of their own security; and could their felicity be equally secure in a way that would not bring misery to

others, this would unquestionably be an enlargement of their joy.

When wicked men are taken out of the world by death, "they have no more that they can do," among the inhabitants of the earth; and when the power of God excludes them from heaven, and from all other society than their own, the gratification which they had, and would still have, in doing mischief, is at an end; their heaven is gone; and their thoughts being turned in upon themselves, are left to feel the enormous weight of their own evil character.

The *influence* which the spectacle of future punishment may have, as a warning to surrounding worlds, to guard them against rebellion, and against consequent misery, may also be a matter of immense importance in an empire so extensive as that of The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity. Hell appears to have been prepared and intended as the great Penitentiary of the Universe. Judicial punishments, under every righteous government upon earth, are intended to protect society; and shall we dispense with all such analogies, in our conclusions respecting the Divine administration, and insist that our Maker inflicts penalties on his creatures for no end at all, or for such ends as he keeps a profound secret from the whole intelligent creation? Such an assumption contradicts all analogy, is inconsistent with reason, and is unsupported by divine revelation.

How far the divine penalties will operate, through the

depths of eternity, to diminish existing misery, or to prevent its augmentation, we are not competent to determine. Dr. Dwight says, "At the final Judgment, the whole state of mankind will be settled agreeably to the most *consummate benevolence.* In this great transaction, and in its consequences, *the mystery* of the present world *will be finished;* the dispensations of God, both to the righteous and the wicked, exhibited as *perfectly in accordance with infinite benevolence;* and the difficulties, which to the eye of reason attend them here, explained in such a manner, as to *stop every mouth,* and *remove every objection.*" (Theology, Vol. I. p. 185.)

Thus the "*infinite benevolence*" of God is represented as operating in his dispensations, "both to the righteous and the wicked." But is not this a new doctrine? It is as old as the apostle John: for if, as he affirms, *God is love,* what can be the action of such a Being, other than such as shall proceed from the principle mentioned by Dr. Dwight? If indeed God were half love and half hatred, we must adopt a different conclusion; but if perfect love always acts consistently with itself, then its every action must of consequence be the action of benevolence.

But does not this suppose that God will exercise benevolence towards the damned? He is certainly disposed to favour them as much as he can without injury to others. Will any man have the assurance to say, that the Divine action towards them will proceed from the principle of malignity? We are aware of the

answer, that future punishment will be the act of Divine *justice.* True; for justice is one essential part of God's eternal character of love. *Justice* secures to every one that which is *right;* and consequently, it secures to every criminal an exemption from all degrees of punishment that would be *wrong.* If God will carry on an administration of justice over hell, it is because hell is under his government, as well as heaven; and consequently its destinies are regulated by the same principles. Is he *just* in one part of his dominions, and *unjust* in another? Has he *good-will* towards a part of his creatures, and *ill-will* towards another part?

Heavenly happiness, indeed, is a bounty; but it is bestowed on those for whom it is prepared, because such a gratuity is *right:*—that is, *just.* Why are not the same favours bestowed upon the inhabitants of hell? Not because their Maker has any ill-will towards them; but because, from their moral relation to God and to society, such a procedure would not be *right:*—that is, would not be *just.*

The plain argument which deserves our serious attention is this: The inhabitants of hell are under the government of God; the government of God is a *just* government; therefore every thing will be done for them that *justice* can do. Or should we vary the phraseology, and say the Divine government is *benevolent;* therefore every thing will be done for them that *benevolence* can do, the conclusion would be the same: for benevolence never did or can do any thing that

would not be just; and justice never did or can do any thing that would be inconsistent with benevolence.

Will not the holy angels rejoice over the condemnation of the wicked, because they *deserve* the punishment which they endure? They undoubtedly will. Why then do they rejoice that thousands and millions of the human race have escaped that punishment, who also *deserved* it? Because these consented to the plan through which the hand of mercy could save them, *consistently with justice;* whereas those in hell refused to be thus saved; their punishment is therefore demanded by the rights and the common welfare of society; hence *justice* and *benevolence* perfectly harmonize in their condemnation.

It appears to have been assumed as an axiom, that an ultimate end with the Almighty, perhaps the only one, in punishing the reprobate, is "his own glory." What is *glory*, but the dignity and loveliness of an *honourable character?* Would God be honoured in the estimation of his creatures, for punishing vast multitudes of them for no reason, or for reasons kept a profound secret with himself? Let the universe clearly understand, that he inflicts punishment only to protect happiness, and to prevent the increase and the spread of misery, and it will be easy to perceive that he hereby manifests his own glory; but to suppose him honoured by inflicting punishments without regard to such ends, appears to involve the inevitable conclusion, that a good ruler and a tyrant have precisely the same kind of

GLORY; whereas the one is *the glory of goodness*, and the other, *the glory of sovereign despotism.* Query—which most evinces the glory of a sovereign, to claim the authority *to do right*—or the power *to do wrong*—or the prerogative *of acting independently of right and wrong?*

We say God can do no wrong; but this saying, according to scripture and reason, means precisely that from the perfection of his nature he always will do right. The claim of having *authority* to do wrong, or of being *above right*, comprehends the emphatical definition of a tyrant. To suppose our Maker to put in such a claim, "for his own glory," is to do violence to reason, to conscience, and to divine revelation; and may well remind us of the sublime language of our Lord Jesus Christ: "O RIGHTEOUS FATHER, the world hath not known thee." It is a delightful consideration, that the inhabitants of heaven are better informed. They know that to impute to the great and righteous Sovereign of nature a kind of "glory" that has so long been exemplified in "the rulers of the darkness of this world," would be greatly to degrade his eternal Majesty. Those triumphant sons of God unceasingly rejoice in the mild and splendid glory of a Being who is *glorious in holiness;*—glorious in *goodness, truth* and *justice;*—glorious in exercising judgment, righteousness, and loving kindness through earth and heaven; "for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jer. ix. 24.)

It may be objected, perhaps, that Dr. Dwight did not

mean to be understood, that God would exercise benevolence in his administration over hell; or if he did, his authority ought to have no weight. Let his authority be sustained, then, by that of Dr. Adam Clarke. "The will of God," he says, "*is ever influenced by his goodness;* therefore he can never make a *bad* or improper choice, nor *determine* any thing that is not good in itself, and good or proper to all those who may be the *objects of its operation.* As God's nature is good, so his will or desire must be good,—good in *itself*, and *good to all those whom it affects:* hence he must be *good in all his actions*, and *good to all his creatures*, in *all his determinations and providential dispensations towards them.*" (Sermon on the Being and Attributes of God.)

Now when Dr. Clarke says every action of God is good in itself, and good to all those who may be the objects of its operation, he evidently means that it is good *in principle*, and in its *universal tendency*. When God punishes evil beings, it is to maintain the good which they would otherwise destroy. The *principle* of this procedure is *opposition to evil;* and that which *opposes evil*, is *good*—that which *opposes unrighteousness*, is *right.* All just punishment tends to *discourage evil;* and therefore it is *good in its universal tendency;* otherwise we say good and evil are not in tendency opposed to each other.

All penalties inflicted by the Supreme Being are the punishments of justice, which is the principle that protects and maintains universal right; but to maintain

universal right is to maintain the system of universal happiness, otherwise we say right does not support happiness; consequently, *justice* is an essential operation of *benevolence*, and must therefore be a *good* thing, both in principle and in tendency.

But does that punishment which is inflicted by the attribute of justice, tend to discourage evil in the beings who are the subjects of the punishment? It certainly tends to produce in them a *conviction* of the evil of which they have been guilty; for if it be a penalty of justice, the precise ground of it is the evil of their character; and every stroke of the rod speaks in powerful language, that it is solely because they are *bad* beings, that a *good* Being thus deals with them. Is not this the exact truth of their situation? And is God unwilling that they should know and believe the truth? Is he not willing that they should acknowledge the justice of his conduct towards them? or does he really wish them to slander his character with the charge of eternal tyranny, contrary to all truth and justice, in order that this falsehood may keep them in a state of unceasing rage and malignity against him? Certainly this cannot be. If the wicked in hell blaspheme God on account of his penalties, the whole of their rage against him is against *justice*, and *truth*, and *love*. The whole effort and conflict of their wicked agency, is in defence of *injustice*, *falsehood*, and *malevolence;* that is, to vindicate themselves, and to cast the whole blame of their condemnation and misery upon God. This disposition constitutes

the very essence of their wickedness; and if God punishes them because of this disposition, the whole operation says undeniably, that it is not his will that they should be wicked; for if it were his will, he would not punish them for it. His penalties speak to the centre of their souls, that their character is utterly *wrong*, and that God is *right*, in the whole of his proceedings against them. Is not this calculated to *convince* them of the depth and inexcusable nature of the evil that is within them? and has not that which convinces men of evil, a tendency to discourage and weaken the evil, and consequently to promote the opposite good? Is it not a good principle in any agent, to weaken the power of evil as much as he can, and to cause his whole course of action to have a tendency to encourage righteousness and goodness in all minds that are capable of distinguishing right from wrong? No man, it is presumed, will venture to answer these questions in the negative; and if the affirmative be true, the clear consequence is, that the best Being in existence is more disposed than any other, to cause all his operations to have a tendency to discourage and weaken the power of evil, and to promote every thing that is right and good, without limitation or restriction.

A hasty alarm will probably here be taken, lest if we follow on in this course of reasoning, it will lead us into conclusions which will encourage men in sin, and militate against the interests of virtue and religion; but as good produces only good, and evil only evil, I hold that

no truth, correctly understood, will ever have a bad influence upon any human soul; and it is hoped if the reader will have patience to proceed to the end of this volume, he will find all the objections met and obviated, which he is beginning to anticipate; and that it is not a true but a false view of the divine character, which has an injurious tendency upon the morals of mankind.

It is *truth* which invariably supports virtue and holiness; and error is as far from being salutary, on one side of the line of correctness, as on the other. To represent future punishment to be *less* than the reality, and to represent it to be *more* than the reality, are both alike *a departure from the truth;* and consequently, being both errors, they will have none other than the influence of error, upon the hearts and actions of mankind. A falsehood, on the side of *vengeance*, may be as injurious in its practical influence, as on the side of *lenity;* and for theological writers to assume, that in regard to the magnitude of penal sufferings there is no possibility of running into an extreme, or that every error, on this side of the question, will of course be salutary in its moral operation, is gratuitously to take for granted that which has no countenance whatever from Divine Revelation, and which involves the egregious absurdity, that error, when advanced in support of hell-torments, has a better effect upon the souls of men than truth and righteousness.

SECTION XI.

Severity of Future Punishment.—Its Eternity.

If it be true, as Dr. Dwight says, that "At the final Judgment the dispensations of God, both to the righteous and the wicked, will be exhibited as *perfectly accordant with infinite benevolence*"—does it not follow, that it will be an advantage to all creatures to be under the government of their Creator? Suppose any of them were under the control and operation of infinite *malevolence*—would not that be worse for them? Or shall we conclude that *love* is as much disposed to produce misery, as *malice* itself can be?

We rejoice to admit, however, that infinite malevolence is impossible; because it is impossible for a being to exist, with the power to exercise it. But in case the Divine Being should abandon sinners and do nothing with them, further than to separate them from his dominions, and leave them to the eternal anarchy of their own malignant dispositions—would such an eternity, or would it not, be worse for them, than to be under the control of their Creator's government?

It may perhaps be said that such a question is more curious than useful. We need feel no reluctance in admitting, that it is improper for us to pry into the secrets of eternity, further than we are authorized by divine

revelation; but so far as that will illuminate our footsteps, so far we may, without hazard, advance.

The state of future punishment has often been represented as an indiscriminate crowding of all the condemned together in one common fire;—that after ages of burning torture, they are hurried away and frozen fast in dreadful regions of *ice;*—that after groaning for ages in that frozen climate, they are hurried back again into fire;—that their *eyes*, *ears*, and *nostrils* are used as mediums of the greatest possible misery; and, finally, that each individual in hell suffers an amount of agony that would be sufficient in a very short time to kill all the inhabitants of the earth, by the mere force of the pain endured. Such, and more, are the representations which have been given of this subject, as the writer has heard and seen, from the pulpit and the press. The design of them, commonly, is to deter men from sin, that they may not go to hell. It must indeed be acknowledged, that the unaccountable stupidity and obstinacy of mankind in sin, appear to call for warnings of the most arousing tendency; but these matters may be carried to an extreme, so as to produce results entirely opposite to those which were intended. Do we deplore the progress of *Universalism?* It would then be well to reflect upon the strong probability that hundreds of Universalists have been made, and hundreds of Deists also, by such horrible representations of future punishment, as caused them to receive the impression that the Christian religion represents the God of nature as an

Almighty tyrant. Will the souls of these men escape hell, and be brought to heaven, by being driven into infidelity? If not, let our concern for the salvation of sinners lead us to consider, whether such representation of future punishment as can be clearly sustained by justice and benevolence will not have a more salutary influence upon mankind, than such as would seem to shroud the divine government in the darkness of an infinite tyranny.

On this subject especially, we should search the Scriptures with great care; and should not be too hasty in drawing conclusions from certain parts, containing highly figurative language, without comparing spiritual things with spiritual, and so explaining those figures, as will correspond with the GREAT PRINCIPLES so abundantly established in the Bible, as the basis of our Creator's judicial procedure.

That God will make use of *fire*, as an instrument of punishment in the future world, as well as in the present world, we have no authority to dispute; but we have a right to reject any representation of the matter that would contradict the principles which God has exhibited as the rules of his administration:—namely, that he will judge the world in RIGHTEOUSNESS;—that he will treat every one ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS;—that it shall be MORE TOLERABLE for some, than for others, in the day of judgment;—and that some shall be beaten with FEW STRIPES, while others shall be beaten with MANY. How is it possible for common sense to apprehend these dis-

tinctions among a crowd of wretches rolling promiscuously together in one common fire?

The threatenings which relate to a future world may be composed of figurative language, as well as those which were used concerning "The day of the Lord's vengeance, for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into *pitch*, and the dust thereof into *brimstone*, and the land thereof shall become *burning pitch*. It shall not be *quenched* night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever: the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it." (Isa. xxxiv. 8, &c.) Again: "For, behold, the Lord will come with *fire*, and with his chariots like a *whirlwind*, to render his *anger* with *fury*, and his rebuke with *flames of fire*. For by *fire* and by his *sword* will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the *slain* of the Lord shall be many. And they shall go forth, and look upon the *carcases* of the men that have transgressed against me; for their *worm* shall *not die*, neither shall their *fire* be *quenched;* and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." (Isa. lxvi. 15, 16—24.)

Our Saviour uses similar language, when speaking of future punishment: "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." The word *worm*, here, is commonly referred to the conscience, and the word *fire* taken literally; but by what rule of interpretation is one figurative word in the same sentence taken lite-

rally, and the other figuratively? If one is material *fire*, why is not the other a material *worm*, so fastened to the flesh of the culprit, that it *dieth not?* The apostle James says, "The tongue is a *fire*, a world of iniquity: it defileth the whole body, and *setteth on fire* the course of nature; and it is *set on fire of hell.*" (James iii. 6.) So that *hell-fire*, we see, is not confined to material substances, but may signify the raging force and malignity of evil passions.

We will notice a few other figurative passages. "Therefore shall the Lord send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a *burning like the burning of a fire.* And the light of Israel shall be *for a fire*, and his Holy One *for a flame:* and it shall *burn* and *devour* his thorns and his briars in one day." (Isa. x. 16, 17.) "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, behold, mine *anger* and my *fury* shall be poured out upon this place, upon *man*, and upon *beast*, and upon the *trees* of the field, and upon the *fruit* of the ground; and it *shall burn*, and shall *not be quenched.*" (Jer. vii. 20.) "For a *fire is kindled in mine anger*, and shall *burn unto the lowest hell*, and shall consume the *earth* with her *increase*, and *set on fire the foundation of the mountains.*" (Deut. xxxii. 22.) "I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in a land which thou knowest not: for ye have *kindled a fire* in mine anger, which *shall burn for ever.*" (Jer. xvii. 4.) "These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall *eat her flesh*, and *burn her with fire.*" (Rev. xvii. 16.)

The place of future punishment is called *a lake of fire, a bottomless pit,* and *a furnace of fire.* That these are warnings of a very awful punishment, cannot be doubted; and it is because the odious abominations of mankind make such warnings and such punishments necessary; but that representations of this kind are given figuratively, may appear from the following passages. "As for those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them. Let *burning coals* fall upon them: let them be *cast into the fire;* into *deep pits,* that they rise not up again." (Psalm cxl. 9, 10.) "He brought me up also out of a *horrible pit,* out of the *miry clay,* and set my feet upon a rock." (Psalm xl. 2.) "Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared: he hath made it *deep* and *large;* the pile thereof is *fire* and *much wood:* the *breath of the Lord,* like a *stream of brimstone,* doth kindle it." (Isa. xxx. 33.) "The Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the IRON FURNACE, even out of EGYPT, to be unto him a people." (Deut. iv. 20.) "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the FURNACE OF AFFLICTION." (Isa. xlviii. 10.) "Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, and he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the Lord, whose FIRE IS IN ZION, and HIS FURNACE IN JERUSALEM." (Isa. xxxi. 9.) "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the *key* of the *bottomless pit.* And he *opened* the bottomless pit;

and there arose a *smoke* out of the pit, as the smoke of a *great furnace;* and the *sun* and the *air* were *darkened* by reason of the *smoke of the pit.*" (Rev. ix. 1, 2.)

Such figurative representations are very striking, and doubtless refer to matters of great weight and solemnity; but when men found a DOCTRINE upon them, to reach through eternity, they would do well to be careful lest they forget their own precautions, and become *wise above that which is written.*

When we consider the enormity of human wickedness—that thousands fill up a long life in establishing and augmenting in themselves a horrible spirit of malignity against all that is called God, or that is worshipped —against all holiness and heavenly happiness—it cannot be doubted, that they will find it "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It will be *indignation* and *wrath*, *tribulation* and *anguish*, upon every SOUL of man that doeth evil. (Rom. ii. 8, 9.) This wrath will operate, in producing anguish, in proportion to the *fuel of malignity* found in each individual soul.

In regard to the *eternity* of future punishment, a candid examination of the Scriptures will fairly and fully conduct us to the conclusion, that the separation which is to take place between the RIGHTEOUS and the WICKED, in the day of judgment, is intended to be an ETERNAL separation. The enjoyments of the kingdom of God, and the privilege of being sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ, are promised to none except to those who

embrace the gracious overture during their probationary existence on earth.

But that the state of the damned will remain uniform, without any modifications of their condition, through the depths of eternal duration, is a matter that no man is able to prove. The reasons for the severity of their punishment, are found in the moral state of their own minds; if this should become modified in individuals during the progress of eternity, so that there would be less *fuel* for Divine wrath to operate upon, we may suppose there would be a corresponding abatement of their sufferings. The fire shall never be *quenched;* but the force of its action will be varied according to the state of the subject on which it operates. And why shall this fire never be quenched? Because no hostile power will ever be able to quench it, either by changing the holy character of God, or by controlling the righteous action of his administration. The eternal fire of his anger and fury is against the spirit of a *corrupt malignity;* and to *quench* this fire would be to change the glory and loveliness of the Eternal Mind. For let it be remembered, that *our God is a consuming fire.* (Heb. xii.)

It may be thought, perhaps, that the Divine penalties are so arranged and established, that their own operation will *necessarily keep up the amount of malignity* that is in each one of the damned, in order to perpetuate their condition, and to prevent any diminution of their torment. Can any man prove this from the Bible?

If this be true, Dr. Dwight must have been utterly mistaken, when he said "The whole state of mankind will be settled agreeably to the most consummate benevolence;" for this essentially implies an invariable regard to happiness; whereas the above hypothesis supposes the Supreme Being to have such an absolute regard to misery, that he fixes sin in the souls of his creatures by omnipotent power, lest they should surrender, and not continue to be suitable subjects of the amount of misery which he delights to inflict upon them. This would plainly charge him with producing and perpetuating misery for its own sake, which charge is only applicable to a being of unmixed revenge and malignity.

The opinion has been too hastily taken for granted, and too generally entertained, that we must necessarily impute this kind of character to our Creator, or otherwise adopt the system of *Universalism.* Let any man fairly prove this to be the inevitable dilemma which we are under, and he will convert me to Universalism; for certainly I would sooner believe that all mankind will be eternally happy, than I would believe our Creator is the most malevolent being in existence. The former may be called a *heresy;* the latter would be the highest grade of *blasphemy;* therefore it would constitute by far the greater crime and heresy of the two. It is incumbent on us to inquire, therefore, if there be not some medium between these extremes.

In regard to the modern system of Universalism, which teaches that all punishment is confined to the

present life, it obviously saps the foundation of responsibility, denies a future Judgment, nullifies the warnings of the Bible, and opens wide the door for accumulating ungodliness and crime. It is difficult to conceive, therefore, how it can be regarded in any other light than as a covert scheme of infidelity.

The system of those called Restorationists, as explained by Mr. Winchester and others, is somewhat different. This admits that God will judge the world in righteousness, and will reward every man according to his works; and hence it appears in a great measure to do justice to the truth of Divine revelation. Its chief objectionable feature consists in gratuitously adding to the revelation of God the following unsupported assumption:—that at some period in eternity all the wicked portion of mankind, and perhaps all devils, will be *restored to the glories and felicities of the kingdom of heaven.*

The advocates of this doctrine do not say, however, that any wicked creatures will be saved in their wickedness; but that they will be restored to holiness, and thereby be qualified for a restoration to heavenly happiness. They believe, if I have a correct understanding of their views, that this universal reformation will be accomplished upon the Calvinistic plan of saving grace; namely, by an irresistible operation of God, that shall suspend or control created agency. For if they suppose agency still to be left free, how can they know what courses will be taken by all wicked men

and devils in a future state? If we judge of the future, by past and present facts, as they come under our observation, the repentance of all sinners, hereafter, does not appear very probable; for thousands of them in this world prove by their words and actions, living and dying, that they have a deep abhorrence of the Almighty; an utter aversion to all virtue and holiness; and an obstinate permanency of resolution, to take delight in malevolence.

This permanency of resolution is not produced in them by another, but is all their own. They are so far from being forced into it, that they obstinately resist and repel every thing that would persuade them into an opposite course. The motives which are calculated to change the purpose of their will are highly calculated to be influential; but sinners turn away their attention from them with decided hostility, and will not admit them into the contemplation of their minds. Now this fixed enmity of heart against God, carries within it a malignant hostility to virtue, and of course to all that happiness which is based on moral goodness as its foundation. Whether sinners will not be found disposed voluntarily to carry on this inexcusable war for ever, is a matter which, it is presumed, no man in this world is able definitely to determine. And even if all should repent and reform, how can Restorationists prove that the Almighty would, in consequence of it, be morally bound to elevate them to the glories of the kingdom of heaven? After forfeiting their eligibility to that king-

dom, by a course of unprincipled wickedness, the spirit of which they obstinately carried with them into eternity, will any future repentance of theirs entitle them to have it *restored* to them? Certainly not.

It will be replied, however, that although they can never do any thing which will give them a *claim* to such a privilege, yet God has not forfeited his right of benevolence; therefore if it be his will to extend such a favour to penitent sinners in a future state, *he has a right to do so.* This must be granted; but that which we affirm is that he has not pledged himself by promise, to grant such a favour to any of Adam's race, except to such as accept the overture upon the gospel plan, during their probationary existence on earth: therefore to conclude that he will do it, is a gratuitous assumption, for which we have no authority whatever from the Bible.

The advocates of this system, and their zealous antagonists, appear to have embraced opposite extremes, by the same mental process. They both appear to take for granted, that they have a complete knowledge of all that will take place under the government of God to all eternity! In their view, no "secret things belong to the Lord our God;" but he has "revealed to us and to our children," all that he knows himself, in regard to the developements of infinite duration! The restorationist tells us that all wicked men and devils will be restored, and be made joint heirs with Christ, in the kingdom of heaven. His opponent avers, with equal

confidence, that all wicked men and devils will continue in a state of infinite punishment, and that there will be no variation in their condition, or in their misery, except by way of increase, while God himself exists. Is it not possible that both these men may be mistaken? Is there no medium between such immense extremes? That there is a vast medium between them, is a matter which is perfectly indisputable; for it is proved by the consciousness of every living man. Ever since we were born, we have found our condition to be a mixture of happiness and misery, in various degrees; and who is the man that has become so wise, as to know with certainty, that such a mixture, and such variety of degrees, can have no place in a future state?

For aught we know to the contrary, our great Creator may now have more than twice ten thousand worlds of moral agents under his superintendency. Some of these may have a larger proportion of misery, and others a larger proportion of happiness, than we have in this world, according to their moral relation to the universe; and we have no evidence of there being any world, excepting only the kingdom of heaven, in which happiness is unmixed and perfect. In what various ways the inhabitants of other worlds may be eligible to a translation into that glorious kingdom, God knows, and we know not. Some of them, peradventure, may never be eligible to such a privilege; and yet may have that kind of mixture of good and evil which we experience, and which may be in such degrees as will render the

condition of some of them more tolerable, and that of others less tolerable, than we find our condition to be in the present life.

Now we may confidently inquire, both of Restorationists and of their opponents, whether they will undertake to prove, *that God has no right to regulate his administration over the whole universe, according to all possible degrees of happiness and misery, — having always a strict regard to the moral condition of all his subjects?* If they admit that he has the *right* to do this, we would inquire, secondly, whether they will undertake to prove, that he has revealed it, *as his fixed and eternal will, that the various degrees of happiness and misery shall not be taken into the account, in his ultimate administration?*

Let it be carefully observed, that we do not presume to determine how many worlds there are in existence, or what is their moral condition. These "secret things belong to the Lord our God;" and not "to us or to our children." We have no evidence that any world, except our own, has fallen from moral rectitude; nor have we any evidence of the contrary. What state of discipline may be necessary for the establishment of the upright in eternal virtue and happiness, or what state of punishment may be necessary for the recovery of the fallen, we know not; but we know that a *mixture* of happiness and misery for fallen creatures, in various degrees, is possible; for it is demonstrated by our own experience; and for aught any man can prove to the con-

trary, this *mixture* may be diversified throughout the universe, with a view to a final and unmixed state of felicity in the kingdom of heaven, for all who will duly improve their respective states of probation. The redemption accomplished by the Son of God in our world, may be equally efficacious in every world where it shall be needed. We could not know, till informed by our Creator, that such a process was necessary in our own world; and if God should tell us, it is equally effectual for the salvation of other worlds, we would have exactly the same ground to believe it, that we have to believe that we ourselves are the redeemed creatures of God. I grant he has not told us so; nor has he any where said, on the other hand, that the influence of redemption must necessarily be confined to the surface of the globe on which we dwell. One of the most fruitful sources of delusion, is man's vain imagination that he is wise enough to know every thing, while the humiliating truth is, that he knows almost nothing. He supposes his intelligence can embrace all the realities of immensity and eternity, at the same time that he is confined to a spot of ground on one little globe, and can scarcely penetrate beneath its surface. He can stretch forward his anticipation through an infinite futurity, and can imagine that he understands the final consummation of the Almighty's vast plan of eternal government! He forms a picture in his mind, of a little heaven, and a very large hell, the one filled with infinite happiness, and the other with infinite misery; and takes

for granted that his comprehension of the whole matter is finished, adequate, and complete!

It may be said however, in reply, that we know what belongs to a future state, because God has informed us concerning the whole matter. Does the Bible say that God has informed us of all things that are known to himself, concerning the developements of futurity? Just the contrary: it says there are *secret things* which *belong to the Lord our God*, and things which have been *hid in God from the beginning of the world.*

In regard to the future misery of the wicked, the Bible teaches expressly that the *degrees* of it shall correspond with the amount of turpitude in the guilty individuals. Now every moral reason which can be given for this judicial procedure, will be exactly the same reason for varying the treatment towards every subject of punishment, as his moral character shall vary. If one shall voluntarily augment the amount of his guilt, his punishment will be increased accordingly; if another shall surrender, and "consent unto the law that it is good," there may be reasons in the system of perfect rectitude, for mitigating his condition; and yet no reasons whatever, for elevating him to the felicities and glories of the kingdom of heaven. The modifications of future punishment here supposed, can be denied on no other ground, than either that *God has no right* to make it any thing less than infinite, or that *it is not his will to do it.* The first dethrones him from his sovereign

majesty, and the second impeaches his eternal character of love.

The doctrine of the Restorationist supposes that the will of reprobates in a future world, being overruled by omnipotent power, must necessarily come out of a state of vice into a state of virtue; while the antagonist system supposes their agency will be overruled by omnipotent power in a contrary direction, and be immutably *bound in necessary sin, as the means of invariable and unmitigated punishment.* These dogmas appear to me to be alike false and unscriptural; while the latter is immensely more reproachful to the Supreme Being, than the former. If it be consistent for any part of mankind to be saved upon this plan of irresistible power, I see not why all might not be saved in the same way; but the supposition that any shall be punished, or that their punishment shall be perpetuated, upon such a principle of free-wrath, is an hypothesis which, if I mistake not, will become darker and darker, the more thoroughly its hidden secrets shall be explored.

On the Bible axiom, that *God is love*, Dr. Dwight's conclusion follows as light flows from the sun, that the ultimate arrangement of the Divine administration, will be "according to the most consummate benevolence;" consequently, his treatment of the wicked will be perfectly just and right; and will have no severity in it that is inconsistent with absolute goodness. Hence it follows, that it is the duty of all the inhabitants of hell to acknowledge the justice and goodness of God in

their punishment; otherwise we say they are under no obligation to acknowledge the truth, nor to give that honour to their Maker's character which is his due. But if it be their duty thus to acknowledge the truth, and if their Creator puts it out of their power to do it, does it not appear to follow, that he hinders them from doing right, and from giving due honour to himself, for the mere pleasure of perpetuating the full cup of their misery?

It may be supposed, however, that they have so destroyed their own faculties, or established in themselves such habits of evil, as to render it eternally impossible, under any circumstances, for them to do otherwise than to deny the truth, and to hate God with unrelenting and undiminished hostility. Can any man prove this from the Bible? If not, why should we be *wise above that which is written?*

That habits of evil may become deplorably confirmed, is indeed a serious reality; but whether it be *possible* for a living soul to become devoid of agency, is a matter on which we may very justly doubt, till we light upon some sort of evidence to conduct us to a definite conclusion.

It may be one end of the Divine penalties, to restrain sinners from going so deep in criminality as they otherwise would go. Punishment restrains the faculties from vice, and hinders men from being as wicked as they otherwise would be, as all prisons and penitentiaries on earth will prove. Now the whole representation of

Scripture concerning future punishment, is that it is established on the plan of a penitentiary, or imprisonment, and is not to be an *execution*. The life of the offender is not taken; but he is bound in chains, and punished in a state of *imprisonment*. Is it not true, that the inmates of a penitentiary are under the government of the state? Is it not true, that a just and good government will not inflict *cruel* and *unnecessary* punishments upon any of them? And is it not equally true, that the government of Almighty God is as just and benevolent as those governments are, which have been formed by mankind?

Let it be distinctly observed, that I do not press this analogy any further than to these two conclusions:—1. That God will not inflict *cruel* and *unnecessary* punishments on any individual; and 2. that his penalties are intended to *restrain* the sinner from greater depths of wickedness, and consequently, from running into greater depths of misery. To say the sinner's punishment will be eternal, is only to say in other words, that he is imprisoned for life; and how much misery will be prevented, in his own individual soul, by restraining him from deeper criminality, and peradventure by subduing, in some measure, and in some period of his existence, his wicked spirit, who but the great Omniscient himself can tell?

The three great axioms of Christian theology are these: First, that the God of infinite wisdom, power

and love, has formed the best possible plan of holiness and happiness.

Secondly, that upon this plan he operates in the best possible manner, to accomplish the good originally intended.

Thirdly, that his impartial mind has no respect to persons, but that towards all individuals, and in all periods of time and eternity, he invariably and immutably uses the best and most efficient means to promote holiness and happiness, and to prevent and diminish sin and misery.

From these principles it follows, that *the fire prepared for the devil and his angels*, was exactly what it ought to be; and that if their Maker had rewarded them for their wickedness, and thereby encouraged them in it, or if he had left them unrestrained, to run into eternal anarchy, such a procedure would have been as *unmerciful*, as it would have been *unjust*. Also that his treatment of the sinners of Adam's race, both in time and in eternity, is so perfectly correct, that the principle of his government could not be altered, without being *altered for the worse*.

The *eternity* of future punishment we are bound to believe, upon the indisputable authority of the Bible; but the notion of its continuing for ever *invariable*, or endlessly *increasing*, is an assumption without evidence, immensely reproachful to the Supreme Being. The prophet Daniel says, "Some shall arise to everlasting *shame* and *contempt*." Now if corporeal sufferings

should at some period, and in some instances, be diminished or removed, and if all mental sufferings should be removed also, except a sense of degradation and contempt, it would still be eternal punishment:—An eternal exclusion from the honour and glory and felicity of "the saints in light, who are equal to angels, and who shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their father" for ever and ever.

We are aware, that the alarm of *heresy* will be taken, at the least deviation from the supposed *uniformity* and *infinity* of hell torments. It is thought essential to the sound and orthodox view of this subject, to believe that all who are condemned in a future state, are entirely abandoned to absolute misery; that no degree of regard will be had to their welfare, throughout eternal ages; and that any concern for them, other than to perpetuate their misery, is not to be supposed to exist in the Divine Mind, and cannot be entertained by any man, without inexcusable heterodoxy.

But why should all regard to the welfare of the millions of those wretched creatures be abandoned for ever? Has the Deity no right to entertain any other disposition towards them, than that of a fixed purpose to perpetuate and augment their misery? If he has a *right* to entertain other sentiments towards them, then it would not be *wrong* for him to aim ultimately at their well-being, so far as it could be promoted without injury to others. If it would not be *wrong* for God to do so, then it is not a *heresy* for us to believe he *may*, at some

time or other, modify their condition, with a view to an abatement of their misery, so far as will consist with the common welfare. Would such a procedure be unworthy of our Creator? Would it tarnish his glory? Would it grieve and offend his holy angels? If at any future period of eternity, a benefit could be extended to some of God's creatures, without injury to any, has not God *authority* to extend to them that benefit? If he *has*, who will be offended to see him exercise it? If he has *not*, in what way has his authority been forfeited?

To extend a benefit to some, without injury to any, would not be unjust, nor would it be unmerciful: then if neither *justice* nor *mercy* would be infringed, what attribute of God would hinder him from exercising such an administration?

It may be replied, perhaps, that we have no right to inquire after any other reason why God makes hell torments invariable and infinite, than that such is his *will*. But this is begging the question. The only way by which we can ascertain the *will* of any agent, is to draw our conclusion from his known attributes. If these be of the benevolent kind, so will be his *will;* if of the malevolent character, of course we may expect his will to correspond with his moral principles. We are supposing it may possibly be the *will* of God, at some future period, to modify the condition of the moral universe in a manner of which we have no definite conception; and if in doing it he should be disposed to

diminish the amount of existing misery, what moral attribute will stand in the way?

It will doubtless be urged, that Divine *truth* stands in the way; inasmuch as God would thereby fail to accomplish his *threatenings*. But this is again begging the question. We do not concede the point, that the Bible gives any authority whatever to believe that God will make future punishment either *invariable*, *augmenting*, or *infinite*. Those who hold the affirmative must not take their position for granted, but must show from the clear testimony of revelation, if they are able, that God has *threatened* these things. It is granted he has threatened eternal punishment; but that *invariability*, *accumulation* and *infinity* are necessarily included in this, is a silent assumption which is unsupported by proof, and which ought not to be taken for granted without examination.

The only effectual way to disarm the various orders of Universalists, is to maintain that God's eternal administration will be carried on according to the perfection of moral principle; that the action of his government will be impartial in its application; that its design will be to discourage sin, and to encourage right conduct in all created minds; that there is nothing unjust or unmerciful in the disposition of the Divine Ruler; and that the whole tendency of his penal arrangements will be to operate against sin, and consequently against misery for ever and ever.

Here the Universalist will reply, that such a course

of action, on the part of God, will certainly bring all sin and misery to an end. How does this consequence follow? Why it follows, he will tell us, from our Maker's Almighty power. But if sin could be brought to an end by a mere exertion of power, what occasion was there for all the apparatus of moral government? What need is there for commandments, exhortations, promises, threatenings, or penalties? If this Calvinistic hypothesis were tenable, we might well inquire why all mankind are not saved from sin and misery, without any of them going to hell? The same answer which the Universalist would give to this question, will be an answer equally applicable to his own assumption, when he removes the Calvinistic notion of irresistible grace to a future state of existence. How does he know that sinners will not be found voluntarily resisting truth and righteousness to all eternity? And even if the most hardened reprobates should surrender, after maliciously fighting against God for millions of centuries, it cannot be proved that good principle would then require that they be rewarded with the honours and felicities of the kingdom of heaven. Such an act of government, for aught that any man can prove to the contrary, might be directly calculated to promote sin and misery, instead of preventing them.

This may be the precise truth of the case, and yet it may be none the less true, that good principle will require that the condition of subdued rebels be mitigated, according to their moral habits, and according

to the circumstances of their surrender to the demands of righteousness.

In regard to the query that may arise in the reader's mind—what would the Creator do with such subdued and yielding sinners? it may be answered by another question:—is it a more easy matter with Him to manage his creatures while they remain wicked, than it is to know what to do with them when they forsake their wickedness? Is he under the necessity to keep them wicked by his own power, or decree, for fear he should not know what to do with them, if they repent and reform? As the Almighty has power to create ten thousand worlds, so he certainly has an undoubted *right* to do it;—and also to people those worlds according to the wise and just provisions of his universal government. The particulars we are ignorant of, but the great truth we know, and in it should rest with entire composure, that *the judge of all the earth will do right.* And that is, to treat his creatures, in the case we are considering, in a way best calculated to promote their own welfare, without injury to that of others. Those who deny this, if any such there be, must suppose that it is not right for creatures to be treated in the way best calculated to promote their own welfare, without injury to the welfare of others; or else, that in a future state our Creator will not do right, and of course, that in some way, a total change will have taken place in his moral character.

Alas! the fear of falling into the heresy of Universalism has caused the christian world to look away from this subject, while their neglect to examine it, and to remove from the doctrine of eternal punishment the tremendous concomitants above specified, has vastly promoted and diffused the system of Universalism, of which they have been so much in dread. Several other questions, relating to this matter, will meet us in the subsequent parts of this discussion; and it is hoped the reader will consider them with that fair and candid attention, which their importance so seriously demands. Let him not hastily conclude, that he is about to be led away from the orthodox faith, into some dangerous system of error and heterodoxy; for God requires the fair exercise of his mental faculties, in searching after the truth;—in doing which, he should take his stand on these two incontrovertible axioms: first, that *truth will never contradict itself;* and secondly, that *truth will never have a bad influence upon the morals and happiness of mankind.*

The author feels an unspeakable solicitude to be candid and conscientious in this course of investigation, that he may not impose either upon his own mind, or upon the mind of his reader, by any species of sophistry or false evidence whatever. The subject cannot be either explained or defended, without following it in its connexions and dependencies; therefore let the reader, in order both to understand the subject, and to appreci-

ate its evidences, patiently and deliberately go on to the end of the volume. By so doing he will find, if I mistake not, that one part of the subject is illustrated and strengthened by another; and that when the various parts are brought together and viewed in their connexions, their evidence will be found to accumulate, and to become entirely satisfactory and convincing.

PART FOURTH.

OBLIGATIONS ON MANKIND RESULTING FROM THE DIVINE CHARACTER.

SECTION I.

Consideration.

The design of our Creator in making himself known to his intelligent creatures, is to impress his own character on them, that they may be beautified with his likeness, and may partake of his essential felicity. This is not to be done by any mechanical action, but by that mental and moral influence of spirit upon spirit, which results from their mutual and voluntary concurrence. The first thing required, on our part, is *attention.* The voice of God through nature, through his written word, or by a spiritual influence, will be alike unavailing, if we *will not consider* the subject of his communication. All the beneficial effects which his goodness designs in our favour, must secondarily depend upon the free exercise of our voluntary powers; and truth cannot occupy the understanding, and influence the soul, unless it be admitted through the medium of a fixed and habitual attention.

And what truth ever approached the human mind which is better calculated to fix its attention than the one before us—*that a supreme Being exists whose power is almighty, and whose immutable character is love?* If created minds should study to all eternity to ascertain what precise circumstances of existence they would choose, how would it be possible for them ever to conceive any thing better, than to live under the protection of Almighty power, invariably directed by infallible wisdom, and by unchanging good-will for the whole creation? A prospect like this is in its nature calculated to fill all mental being with the most sublime enjoyment, and with sentiments of wonder, love, and praise. Yet, amazing to tell! few subjects of human thought are more habitually overlooked and neglected by man's heedless and infatuated spirit! '*Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*'

How is this strange phenomenon to be accounted for? It cannot be doubted that the subject of God's glorious character is the most *worthy* of consideration of any that can be held up to the view of the human understanding. It is equally evident that every one of us has a deeper *interest* in this subject than in any other; and also, that it has the highest claims, and imposes the greatest possible *obligation* upon all created spirits. Then why is it that mankind *will not consider* this matter of such overwhelming importance? Alas! there must be an unspeakable depth of folly and of crime, in

this astonishing and inexcusable disposition of the human heart.

Did I say *inexcusable?* But they all with one consent begin to make excuse. One must go to his farm, and another to his merchandise. One is too *busy*, another too *merry*, and another too *indolent* to devote any consideration to the character and claims of Him who brought them into life! They practically and contemptuously say by their actions, that every thing belonging to God's authority and kingdom is utterly beneath their attention! Is it because they will not believe he is a Being of a perfectly good character? And why will they not believe? Because they *will not consider*. Do they take for granted, as a matter of intuitive certainty, that the claims of God upon them are severe and unjust, as being calculated to destroy their mirth, their amusements, their pleasures, their reputation and their worldly interests? But it is obviously deducible from the character of infinite perfection, as well as established by the Divine testimony, that it is from a benevolent regard to our own felicity that God withholds any kind or degree of pleasure from mankind. He prohibits such pleasures only as would render us foolish and criminal, and would destroy the permanent happiness of our existence. If men would duly exercise their minds in thinking, the rays of truth would show them the correct state of the case; and the delusive snare would be broken. Sinful pleasures and amusements would be seen to be vain and destructive;

while God would appear as the essential *Fountain of living waters.*

It is consideration which gives strength to argument, and energy to motive; therefore on it depends, chiefly, the ultimate character and destiny of every man. I do not mean that in the abstract it adds any thing to the force of arguments and motives; but that their inherent strength is brought to bear upon the mind and heart, in proportion as they are weighed in the balance of impartial consideration.

A doctrine has sometimes been hastily entertained, which would perfectly excuse the inconsiderate sinner, in all his heedless inattention to the communications and claims of his Creator: namely, that neither belief nor action is in our power; but that every man necessarily believes according to the strongest evidence, and acts in the direction of the strongest motive. But the strength both of *arguments* and *motives*, is modified in its influence on the mind, by the amount of consideration devoted to it. A good argument or motive gathers strength in proportion as the mind attentively surveys it; and a defective one loses its force, by precisely the same process.

Ought not every man's judgment to follow the best arguments, and his will to follow the strongest motives? If we answer in the affirmative, it follows that every one is able to do so; otherwise we say men *ought* to do that which they *cannot* do. If on the other hand we say men *ought not* to follow the strongest arguments

and motives, then they ought not to be wise and virtuous. This conclusion cannot be denied, unless it can be made to appear that the strongest reasons and motives do not lead to wisdom and virtue; and if this can be made to appear, it will follow, either that God does not enjoin on mankind to be wise and virtuous, or that he has failed to give them sufficient reasons to influence them practically to regard his injunctions.

Is it *wise* for a man always to follow the strongest reasons and motives? If it is, and if it be true that every one *must* do so, and *cannot* do otherwise, then of course every man in the world is a wise man by necessity, and such a being as a *fool* has never existed upon the earth. The same will equally apply to virtue and piety; and, in short, if this metaphysical and mechanical force of evidence and motives be admitted, the distinction between wisdom and folly, right and wrong, must be given up.

But why need we puzzle ourselves with these abstract speculations? We have the knowledge of consciousness, which is that of perfect certainty, that we are free, both in the formation of our opinions, and in the performance of our actions. We can consider a subject, or totally neglect it, whether it be a matter of faith or of practice; and on that consideration depends the strength or the weakness, both of the evidence and the motive by which we are influenced. This freedom, it is true, is not absolute; it is limited in various ways;

but still it is sufficient to lay the foundation for our responsibility, and "to justify the ways of God to man."

In the holy Scriptures men are charged with being stiff-necked, obstinate, hard-hearted and rebellious; always resisting the Holy Ghost, and turning away their ears from the truth. Now all this implies resisting motives, in order to prevent their influence on the mind. And when a man *resists* the influence of a motive, is it because he is compelled to do it by an opposite motive which is irresistible? Then why need he resist the weaker motive, seeing the stronger one will draw him in the course of destiny without any effort on his part to aid its operation?

This resistance of good motives, which the Bible represents as an enormous crime, consists chiefly in an obstinate *inconsideration;* for it is only by a candid attention to the truth, that the force of the motives presented by it can be felt and appreciated; and of course a neglect of this attention, will cause the motive to be unperceived. The sinner bars his mind against the truth, by levity, scorn, company, amusements, and diversified scenes of dissipation, on purpose to prevent reflection; and he does this that the weight of religious motives may not get hold of his understanding, disturb his conscience, and interrupt him in the indulgence of his vicious passions. This is the main-spring of infidelity and irreligion; it is the fruitful source of all kinds of wickedness; it is the principal cause of the misery and perdition of mankind.—THEY WILL NOT CONSIDER.

It is also the chief cause of the prevailing error which misrepresents the character of God, and of his administration. It is thought necessary for hell to be exhibited before the mind, as a state of misery, as great as Almighty power can make it; because it is supposed that nothing short of this will have a restraining influence upon sinners. But if men would be *considerate*, they would perceive that there are stronger motives to obey God, arising from a just view of his righteous character, than can possibly result from all the fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, that ever entered into the human imagination. They would see that the former source furnishes stronger motives than the latter, even to operate upon their *fears*, provided we speak of an *intelligent* fear, and not the fright and terror of a mere *animal*. What can more effectually excite the fears of a *rational* being, than the anticipation that his punishment will be required by a benevolence which is unmixed with any malignant sentiment towards any creature in existence? This supposes that sin involves a dreadful necessity for his punishment. How alarming the thoughts, that all heaven will agree to his condemnation, because the well-being of heaven requires it! All virtuous beings are compelled to take a determined though reluctant stand against him! Then where shall the sinner look for hope or consolation? If heavenly love is constrained to cast him off, can the malice of hell do any thing for his benefit?

The fears of a terrified imagination, picturing hell as

a very frightful place, may indeed make a strong impression upon the feelings of the heart; but they cannot enter so deeply into the intelligence of the mind, nor produce so permanent an influence upon the will, as the impressive anticipations derived from a rational and correct view of the justice and perfection of moral government.

Some appear to suppose, on the contrary, that it is dangerous to exhibit to mankind any other views of future misery, than such as will fill the mind and imagination with the utmost horror possible. Nothing must be said or intimated, which will imply any thing else than that sinners, when sent to hell, will suffer the utmost agonies of fire;—that their senses, external and internal, all the capacities of their physical and mental being, will be filled as full of torment as they can hold;—and that their agency will be judicially held in a state of invariable corruption, in order that their misery may be perpetuated, and may continue increasing for ever and ever. Now after a minister has finished a sermon of this kind, let him sit down and CONSIDER, whether it would be within the bounds of possibility for an almighty Moloch to do any thing more than he says will be done by the God of love? and whether it will not follow from such doctrine, that an infinite tyranny is necessary to the welfare of God's creation? Must such views as these be constantly urged upon mankind, because no other conceptions of God and futurity will restrain them from sin? Then what a ridiculous and mysterious race

of creatures we are! It seems to imply that men's hatred of God's character and kingdom, is such, that they will resolve to sin on till they die, provided only that their future punishment be not extended to the utmost bounds of possibility. And will any other conception cause saints also to apostatize, because of their deep desire to get away from God? Will nothing short of the anticipation of infinite misery be sufficient to keep them to their allegiance? Would the inhabitants of heaven *also go away*, if it were not for a like anticipation? Alas! an affirmative answer to these questions would presumptuously assume, that the service which God requires of his children is so oppressive, that nothing short of despotic power will keep any of them to their duty; or, in other words, that God has to be a tyrant in his penalties, because he is a tyrant in the obedience which he requires of his creatures.

It is readily admitted that the utmost care should be observed, not to give encouragement to sin; but the way to avoid this, is to point out the deep malignity of sin, both in principle and in tendency. Its odious deformity, and poisonous influence upon happiness are such, that pure benevolence is constrained to treat sinners with a severity that is inconceivably dreadful, as the only possible way of preventing a greater evil. Should sinners be unrestrained in their abominations, not only would they diffuse misery through the creation, but would in the issue bring a greater amount of it upon themselves, than they are made to feel by the operation

of the Divine penalties. This doctrine, while it furnishes the greatest discouragement to sin that can be conceived, at the same time encourages the sinner to turn to God, as to the bosom of infinite love; but to tell mankind, on the other hand, that sin in itself would not be productive of any great misery, were it not for an Almighty act of arbitrary vengeance, would not be calculated to discourage sin; but to demolish the foundation of virtue and holiness, by representing the Supreme Being as full of malevolence, and as having nothing in his character that can be regarded as an intelligent basis of hope, confidence, or complacency.

SECTION II.

The Fear of God.—Repentance.

Fear is one of the prominent springs of action in human nature; and it always implies an apprehension of some calamity, or of some kind of unhappiness, which we desire to avoid.

When it apprehends danger of any kind from the action of a voluntary agent, it is excited by our view of his character and designs, and modifies our conduct accordingly. If we apprehend that we are in danger of falling under any afflictive action of a malignant being, fear excites us to inquire for a way of escape;

we naturally run from him, and if we can be concealed where he cannot find us, we gladly avail ourselves of such an asylum. If we cannot hide ourselves, or run away and escape his pursuit, the next inquiry is, are we able to *resist* and to *conquer* him? If so, we at once assume the attitude of determined opposition. But if this be regarded as a hopeless enterprise, the third inquiry is, can we do any thing to appease his anger, or to change the purpose of his mind? Fear will influence us to *flatter* him, to *deceive* him, and to take every advantage of his passions; but never to *trust*, or to *love* him.

Does our Creator require of any of his creatures to exercise towards him this kind of fear? Never. And why not? Precisely because our Creator is not a malignant being. But how, it may be inquired, can a perfectly *good* being, be regarded as an object of *fear?* Because a good being loves and supports goodness only: *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, and consequently *hateth iniquity.* To say that a perfectly *good* being loves and patronises *evil*, is a contradiction; for a righteous principle in any mind, is an invariable resolution to maintain *right*, and of course to oppose every thing that is *wrong;* because the former is the source of all happiness, and the latter is the source of all misery. Almighty goodness is clothed with supreme authority, to demand good conduct of all that are under his dominion; and to punish evil-doers to the utmost

extent that may be necessary to protect the common welfare, and to maintain universal right.

Now the fear of such a Being, is a fear arising from a just view of the essential goodness of his character; this influences us to forsake *wrong*, which is the only thing that goodness punishes, and to pursue and practise *right*, which it always sanctions and rewards. Hence we perceive, that this fear, far from causing us to run away from God, draws us unto him, and influences us to conform to his righteous law, as the only way of happiness and safety. We fear the energy of his holy character, which always strikes at a *distance;* we come into the *centre* of it, where we are safe; and there remains nothing to excite uneasy apprehensions.

This fear of God, arising as it does from a just view of his perfect character, includes in it all the reverence that is due to such a character. The more clear our conceptions are of the glory and loveliness of the Eternal Mind, the more cause have we to love and admire it; and at the same time, the greater is our fear of its displeasure.

> "Abash'd the devil stood, and felt how *awful*
> Goodness is." — MILTON.

The reader need not be told how often the fear of the Lord is enjoined in the Old and New Testament; but a few specimens may be given to show that the kind of fear required, is that which draws the soul to God, as above described. "Only fear the Lord, and *serve him*

in truth, with all your heart." "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and *keep my commandments always*." "Fear God and *keep his commandments*, for this is the whole duty of man." "The fear of the Lord is *to depart from evil*." "*Serve God* acceptably, with *reverence* and godly fear." "*Perfecting holiness* in the fear of God."

Now we say it is obligatory on mankind to exercise this fear, and that the obligation results from the perfection and glory of our Creator. We are bound to fear and reverence the authority of goodness; for goodness, and nothing else, possesses authority. We may fear and dread a tyrant; but there is no virtue in this fear, nor does it result from a regard to just authority; for in a tyrant there is none. We may dread his *power*, his *cunning*, and his *malevolence;* but a fear of these things, where there is no goodness, only excites in us hatred and contempt; and influences us to flee as far as we can from the abhorred object, or else to approach only to deceive, to flatter, or to *fight* him. A tyrant, we say, has *no authority;* and therefore his character cannot impose on us any manner of *obligation*. Authority signifies the right to govern, which is the right of goodness alone; and the pretended right of conquest, is an old claim of despotism, derived from the ridiculous assumption that *right* has its origin in *power*. If a just authority can be separated from goodness, then of course the devil is a proper ruler, and ought to be feared and reverenced as such.

Both *power* and *intelligence* are lovely and glorious, when operating as the agents and ministers of *Benevolence*, from the influence of which they derive all their beauty and all their value; but when perverted from their proper ends, by being associated with malignity, they lose all their authority; and we feel no other sentiment towards the tyrant, than a desire to defeat his wisdom, and to despoil him of his power.

We are told that there was an unjust judge, who feared not God nor regarded man; whence we infer, that where there is no reverential awe of a righteous governing power, there will be no regard to the welfare of society. The apostle Paul, in giving the darkest portrait to be found any where on record, closes it by saying, *There is no fear of God before their eyes.* (See Rom. chap. iii. verses 10—18.) Now if the fear of God restrains men from such vices, and leads to the opposite virtues, as the Scriptures every where testify, this fear is undeniably excited by the authoritative influence of a perfect character; and consequently, so far as the imagination clothes the Almighty with false attributes, so far the fear of such a being is corrupt in principle, and deficient in moral tendency.

It is on this ground alone, that a soul destitute of the fear of God, is in a criminal condition; for a refusal to fear an evil or malignant being is no crime. We are not commanded to fear the devil; but on the contrary, to *resist*, and *fight*, and *conquer* him, with *the whole armour of God.* And throughout the universe, wherever

a tyrant is found, it is a virtue to resist him, and to overcome him if we can. Not, however, with carnal weapons; but with those which are "mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." All despots dread the power of *truth* and *love*, more than they dread any other weapon that can be brought to bear against them; and by the energy of these principles does our Maker operate throughout the moral universe.

It is the reverential fear of this holy Being that brings the sinner to repentance. To repent for having rebelled against a tyrant, is to repent for having done right; for tyranny is essentially abominable, and is the foundation of all kinds of misery.

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that *the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." (Rom. ii. 4.) To repent is to acknowledge that we have done *wrong;* and of course, that the law which God enjoined upon us was *right;* that we have been *bad* creatures in opposing God, and consequently that He whom we opposed is *good.* The more impressive our views are of his eternal excellency, the deeper is the conviction of our own vileness and depravity. Hence it is clear as day, that the *goodness* of God is the only thing that ever did or ever will lead any sinner to true repentance. How vain is the imagination, then, that it is necessary to

clothe the Almighty with the attributes of a tyrant, in order to restrain men from sin, and to keep them from being impenitent! It is a daring and an inexcusable hostility to infinite kindness, which renders the character of the sinner so truly contemptible and odious. With a fool-hardy obstinacy and self-importance, he contemns God, instead of fearing him. He *despises goodness;* and what could the devil do more? The sinner spends his breath in cursing and bitterness, instead of prayer; he hates God, because God is lovely; he tramples upon the rights and the happiness of his fellow men, and hardens his heart in impenitency. Hence he treasures up wrath unto himself; and all beings who have any truth and goodness in them, will agree that he ought to be damned. The righteous judgment of God against him will be amiable and lovely in the sight of all heaven; and no where but in the dark anarchy and despotism of hell, will any cavil or objection be made against it. The excuses and apologies of sinners will be seen to be all founded upon falsehood, and that they persisted in their mad hostility, because God would not patronise and sustain them in maliciously violating the rights of universal society.

We should be careful not to represent God as the author of evil, or as delighting in vengeance; because it is plain that in proportion as the blame is cast upon God, it is taken off from the sinner; which of course will tend to excuse and harden him in his impenitence. Let the sinner be convinced that God is perfectly just

and amiable in his dispositions, purposes, and actions, from everlasting to everlasting; and this goodness of God, if any thing, will lead him to a true and honest, and effectual repentance.

It is not the will of God that his creatures should fear him with a tormenting fear; for he desires that they should love him perfectly; and the apostle John says, *Perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment.* A soul filled with this love hath no dread of future punishment, and no torment arising from that dread. Yet the fear of God abides within him, in higher perfection than it ever did before. But how can this be reconciled with our definition of fear, that it always implies an apprehension of some calamity, or of some kind of unhappiness, which we desire to avoid? The answer is, that to the mind of a perfect lover of God, the apprehension of *displeasing* him, or in any way *grieving his Holy Spirit,* is regarded as a calamity and an unhappiness, more influential upon him, than the fear of future punishment itself is upon the returning penitent, in the incipient stages of his reformation.

SECTION III.

Confidence in God.

A PERFECT character entitles its possessor to the full confidence of others, which cannot be withheld or refused without an act of the highest injustice. Where there is no confidence in God, there can be no gratitude, no obedience, no hope, no happiness, and no heaven. Hence the demand for our *faith* is obviously at the foundation of every other claim that our Maker can have upon us. If God be not trustworthy, he deserves not our love, and has no right to our respect or our obedience. If we have a right to disbelieve, we have an equal right to refuse and rebel, and to fight against God. Unbelief, therefore, is the original sin, and the parent crime, which nourishes and strengthens every other vice of the human heart. Its first-born is pride; which is the belief of a falsehood concerning our own worth, virtue, wisdom or ability. This takes its rise from a disbelief in the glory of the Divine character, which glory we proudly transfer to ourselves.

The faith required in the gospel does three things: first, it does justice to the evidence of truth, which sustains and proves the character of God; secondly, it honours God for having such a character; and thirdly, it confides or trusts in God, to support all our essential interests in time and in eternity.

Nothing but a perfect character can inspire such confidence, or be worthy of it; a Being possessing this is worthy of it, and has a just right to claim it, from all to whom his excellency is made known.

"God, we are to remember," says Dr. Dwight, "is the last appeal, resort, and hope, of Intelligent beings. By whomsoever else the soul is deceived, or disappointed, it rests on him with perfect reliance; because it considers *his truth as the great mountains, and his faithfulness as enduring for ever.* If no confidence could be placed in him, none could be placed elsewhere. Every thought, purpose, interest, consolation, and hope, would be afloat on the waves of a boundless and perpetually disturbed ocean, where rest and safety could never be found. All beings would distrust all; and the universe, filled as it is with inhabitants, would become a solitude. Suspicion and jealousy would make all beings strangers, and enemies to each other. Suspense would fill every mind, and hang over every enjoyment. The Mind, stretching its view through eternity and immensity, would discern no pole-star, by which it might steer its course; no haven, whither it might betake itself for safety and repose. The truth of God hushes this stormy and restless ocean to peace. All his creatures know, or may know, that his purposes, declarations, and promises, are eternal and immutable; and that, therefore, he cannot deceive their confidence, nor disappoint their reasonable hopes; that he is *the Rock*, on which is founded the great building of the uni-

verse: the foundation and the building both eternal. Were these facts reversed, he could present no motives to voluntary obedience; nor act as the Moral Governor of rational beings." (p. 210.)

Now from this view of the subject, it is easy to see that unbelief, destroying as it does all confidence in the mind of the unbeliever, and disposing him to do all he can to shake the confidence of others, strikes directly at the centre of all virtue, and all happiness.

"The Truth, or Veracity of God," says Dr. Dwight, again, "is especially that part of his moral character, on which the faith or confidence, which is termed Evangelical, ultimately rests. On this attribute all his declarations, promises, and covenants, entirely depend for their truth and certainty; and therefore all the confidence, which creatures can place in his character, designs, or conduct.

"But unless we believed him SINCERE in promising, we could not believe that he would bestow them. Between confidence in the truth of God, and distrust of his truth, there is no alternative. It is metaphysically, as well as Scripturally, true, that *he, who believeth not God, hath made him a liar.* Let me then ask whether this distrust of God, this attribution to him of so odious and contemptible a character, this last insult, can possibly be pleasing to God? Yet this is a fair description of all unbelief; or, as it ought rather to be termed, disbelief, or distrust. As, then, there is no medium between this character and confidence, or faith; it is, I think,

past all doubt, that faith is indispensably necessary to acceptance with God." (pp. 211, 212.)

This conclusion may well be considered "past all doubt;" for how can God accept a character, that contains within itself a principle which *hath made Him a liar*, and which tends to destroy the trust and affection of his whole Intelligent creation?

Why do we confide in the *power* of God? Because it is the agency of infinite *love*. Why do we trust in his *wisdom?* Because it is ever employed to devise ways and means of promoting universal happiness. Why do we expect the fulfilment of his *promises?* Because of the unchangeable sincerity of him whose veracity is pledged. These perfections, as concentrated in the Divine Mind, must for ever be the object of supreme confidence in the rectitude of God's actions towards all other beings, as well as towards ourselves; for a perfect character must apply to all alike, and treat them according to the truth and reality of their moral condition.

If a mysterious being should confer favours upon an individual, or upon a limited number of individuals, for no reason that we know of, except some unaccountable pleasure of his own will, such favours would be no proofs of character, and could be no permanent foundation for either faith or love. If the favours were not bestowed *upon principle*, there is no rational ground to anticipate their perpetuity; and if they *were* thus bestowed, the same principle would operate with perfect consistency

towards all beings, according to the reality of their moral state, and their relation to universal society. Favours received from the influence of a capricious partiality, can never inspire perfect confidence, and can never deserve it. A pure love of rectitude, which is necessarily universal in its application, constitutes the essence of a holy character; and this alone sustains the unceasing happiness of heaven. Could saints and angels around the throne of God believe that there are beings in existence, who are dealt with upon different and opposite principles, from those which regulate their own destiny, how soon would their confidence waver, and their prospects settle down under a portentous and lowering cloud! In vain may *promises* be reiterated, in regard to their own continued welfare; for the entire value of promises is derived from the veracity, goodness, and rectitude of the Promiser; and these principles will apply with impartiality to all beings that are susceptible of their influence. Will sincerity and veracity ever cause a person to speak truth to some individuals, and falsehood to others? As little will the love of justice influence any being to act justly towards some persons, and unjustly towards others. As little will the principle of benevolence influence any being to act kindly towards some persons, and cruelly towards others. *Consistency* and *impartiality* are essential to a good character, without which an intelligent trust in God can have no permanent foundation.

Of course, the confidence both of saints and angels,

to be rational, unwavering, and satisfying to the mind, must embrace the entire government of the Deity, in its application to the whole accountable universe. Every doctrine, therefore, which would show a want of principle in the Divine administration over hell, would sap the foundation on which the felicity of heaven is based. This matter will come more particularly under review in the following section.

SECTION IV.

Injurious Tendency of such Views of the Divine Government as are inconsistent with this Confidence in God.

It is commonly taken for granted with great composure, that so long as a man is a firm believer in the doctrine of eternal punishment, no matter how absolute and tremendous he may represent that punishment to be, there is no danger of his doctrine producing a bad effect upon mankind. The whole of the danger, it is supposed, is on the other side; while it is gratuitously assumed, that the more awful the representation is, concerning the future misery of the wicked, the more will sin be discouraged, and the more will all holiness be supported, enlarged, and established.

Hence the matter has often been unhesitatingly exhibited, first, that the punishment of all the condemned in a future state will be eternal; secondly, that it will

be without intermission; thirdly, that it will continue constantly increasing; and lastly, that it will be as excruciating and agonizing as it can be made by the energy of Almighty Power. In one word; that it will be INFINITE. It is supposed that the more full and horrifying the anguish is represented to be, the more pure is the doctrine, and the more efficient and sanctifying will be its influence upon the souls of the people. That this is the precise view entertained by thousands, and which has been impressed on their minds by certain systems of theology, will appear by examining the principal arguments by which the extent of future punishment has been commonly supported. These arguments, which we have heard and seen, from the pulpit and the press, are the following:

First, that punishment must be eternal, otherwise God will not do all that he *can* to discourage sin. This argument assumes that the only way for God to do his uttermost against sin, is *to punish sinners as much as he can.* Of course, he will punish them for ever, because he has power to do it; and it equally follows, that he will make the anguish fill their entire capacity, and will cause it to increase to all eternity as much as he is able; otherwise, according to the argument, he will fail to give as full a discouragement to sin as he *can.*

Secondly, we are told that sin is an infinite evil, and therefore deserves infinite punishment. Now infinite punishment is the utmost that can be inflicted by the energy of Omnipotence. Any thing short of this would

be less than infinite. Of course, if the irresistible agency of God can cause it to increase, he will augment its intensity as much as he is able, through all the periods of an unending futurity!

Thirdly, it has been often represented, that the Bible doctrine concerning different *degrees* of punishment in a future state, signifies only that there will be different degrees of capacity to suffer, and each will be as full of misery as it can hold, like vessels of different sizes cast into a lake of water. On this supposition, if all are to be punished according to their works, it follows that *sin modifies the capacities of creatures;* and that every additional sin *increases the sinner's capacity to suffer.* Consequently, if they continue to sin to all eternity, their capacity will be for ever increasing, and will constantly be kept full of misery.

Fourthly, we have heard the argument advanced, that as all sin is ingratitude to infinite love, it is not possible for the sinner to suffer more than he deserves. Now as every sin is of this character, each sinner deserves the full cup of misery which the argument assumes and rests upon as its basis; of course the Scripture doctrine concerning different *degrees* of punishment, can have no intelligible signification.

On the same ground the consequence will follow, that a day of Judgment would be useless; for this implies an apportionment of punishment according to the varieties of culpability; but as there are no *degrees* in

infinity, there can be no variation in the penalty; and therefore no need of a judicial process.

It equally follows from the same hypothesis, that tyranny or injustice towards the damned would be impossible; for if no punishment can be greater than they deserve, of course were it possible for malevolence to be clothed with Almighty power, its energy could not exceed the turpitude of any one condemned sinner in perdition.

In regard to the distinction which we have observed in books of divinity, that the punishment which is infinite in duration, is finite in degree, it has no tendency to clear up the mystery; for besides involving the plain contradiction, that a thing can be *finite* and *infinite* at the same time, it is inconsistent with all the arguments by which the doctrine is commonly supported. If our Maker, to give the highest discouragement to sin, must punish sinners as much as he *can*, his stroke must be infinite in degree as well as in duration. If the capacity of each is as full of torment as it can hold, it is not possible for infinite power to make it hold more. If the punishment cannot be greater than the sinner deserves, for his ingratitude to infinite love, then he deserves all that can be comprehended within the bounds of possibility. It is plain, therefore, that the doctrine which is sustained by such arguments, is that of infinite punishment in the most absolute sense. If the penalty be really finite, it may of course be modified and varied, according to all the variations of voluntary guilt.

Hence the reader may understand distinctly, that the doctrine which stands as the antagonist of the views which I advocate, however it may conceal itself, is precisely that of *infinite punishment*, in the full and absolute sense of the term. If this be given up, and the doctrine of *finite* punishment be acknowledged as the truth of God, then the position cannot be successfully controverted, that all varieties of culpability will meet with a corresponding course of treatment. This supposes the whole matter to be superintended by principle, on the part of the great Ruler of created agents; and it is perfectly obvious that a benevolent Ruler will never inflict punishment for its own sake, but for the sake of promoting *good*, and counteracting *evil;* consequently, every possible reason that can influence a righteous Sovereign to apportion his penalties according to the degrees of guilt, at the time when sinners are first consigned to punishment, will equally influence him to vary his administration, according as the degrees of voluntary guilt shall vary through the endless progress of future duration. If we abandon this ground, the government of *principle* is given up; and infinite misery is held forth as an ultimate end of the Divine government. Now I seriously ask how any human understanding can distinguish this from the most permanent and heartless tyranny? I ask how any soul that believes it can look into eternity without a horror of mind which implies utter distrust of the Almighty, and a painful sympathy for his fellow-creatures, who are supposed

to be consigned to a state of existence, which could not be made worse by any force and energy of infinite malignity? To suppose such a distorted and dark view of the Supreme Being will either discourage sin or operate against the spread of Universalism, appears to me to be as baseless and untenable an hypothesis as ever entered into the imagination of mankind. It silently and presumptuously assumes, that Manicheism, or a compound of partiality and tyranny in the Supreme Being, is indispensably necessary, both to avoid the heresy of Universalism, and to restrain the human family from sin! According to this assumption, an Almighty Tyrant would be the greatest friend of holiness, and the most efficient opposer of sin, of any Being that could possibly exist!

In short, the arguments and illustrations above specified, go to one conclusion: namely, that all mankind who miss of heaven, will be made for ever *as miserable as it is possible for Almighty God to make them.*

That such a doctrine is calculated to have an injurious influence upon the souls of men, and to promote sin, and not holiness, will appear, if I mistake not, from the following considerations:

1. Its immediate tendency is *to promote the spread of Universalism.* For let the teachers of that system be able to show the people that the view above stated is really that which is called the orthodox doctrine, and according to the well-known tendencies of human nature, they can so exhibit the frightful picture, as will not

fail to hurry thousands entirely over to their favourite hypothesis, that there are no penalties whatever inflicted in a future state. Our antagonists are thus permitted to occupy a fortress which is invulnerable; for they have a magazine of arguments which have never been answered, and which never can be answered, while Universalists can hold up their own doctrine in bold contrast with the shocking and indefensible views of futurity above described.

2. The doctrine tends to *the increase and justification of infidelity.* The first thought that occurs to the mind, upon surveying the above hypothesis, is that it represents God as a Being whose immutable disposition is to delight in the agonies of his creation. Hence the next conclusion is, that if the Bible teaches such a doctrine, and is indeed a revelation from him, such a revelation must be regarded as a real calamity to mankind. But as there is no analogy in nature to countenance such a horrible view of our Creator, the deist concludes that the Bible is not a revelation from him.

3. It tends to *support and perpetuate the worst and most barbarous systems of divinity that were ever invented.* For how is it possible to take any other view of the subject under consideration, than that, if it be true, there is something in the nature of God which causes him to take pleasure in seeing anguish and torment abound through a vast extent of his empire? And if this be an essential part of his disposition, how natural is the conclusion, that for the pleasure of his own will,

he ordained creatures to this misery from all eternity? Nor would it be a very far-fetched inference, that with such a disposition, the misery and anguish of little infants in hell might be surveyed by him with a peculiar relish and delight. O indulgent and righteous Father! who can restrain his tears at the thought that there is a necessity to repel such shocking suppositions from being applied to thy gracious and paternal Mind!

4. *It produces and perpetuates in the minds of sinners, an obstinate inattention to futurity.* The doctrine which they so frequently hear concerning hell, fills their imagination with the one glaring idea, that Almighty God intends to make use of the most effectual means in nature, and to exert the utmost energies of his irresistible power, to make all the damned as miserable as possible without intermission and without end. Hence a sullen determination becomes fixed in their minds, that they will not seriously think upon the subject. They secretly say within themselves—from such a Being very little is to be *hoped;* and we are determined that he shall not control our *fears.* Hence a kind of mad resolution settles down in their hearts, that they will turn their attention to other matters, and dismiss the subject of judgment and eternity from their minds, with very little consideration. The doctrine under review naturally *tends* to produce this effect; and therefore instead of saving sinners, there is reason to apprehend that it has contributed to the perdition of thousands.

To produce *conviction* in a man's mind, we must get

hold of his *attention*, his *understanding* and his *conscience*. In order to this, it must be proved and made manifest to him, that there is a dreadful evil in sin, which makes it indispensably necessary for pure goodness to punish the sinner; that our gracious Creator really delights in universal happiness; that he has no malevolence towards any being in existence, and never will have; but that evil beings must be arrested by the hand of justice, and bound under the righteous penalty of the Divine law, or their malignant agency would diffuse misery throughout the universe. Such views are calculated to call up the attention of the mind to the destructive nature of sin, on the one hand, and to the amiable character of our Creator, on the other; and hence to lead to a genuine repentance and reformation. But such glowing images of hell and vengeance, as would seem to represent the highest malignity to be *in the law of God*, instead of being *in the law of sin*, cannot be expected to have a truly reforming operation upon mankind.

5. The doctrine *involves many serious christians in a large amount of mental embarrassment, whereby they are weighed down with heavy weights, and hindered in the way of life.* Whether they are to regard their Creator as a *good* or a *bad* Being, or as a contradictory *compound* of both, they are afflictively at a loss to determine. Their children they look upon with tears. For what *father* would not rather wish that his children had never been born, than that he should have

incessantly to mourn over the strong probability that a majority of them, after a few short years of vexation here, will be consigned to a state of interminable anguish, where their Creator will have no other thought or concern about them, than to exert his omnipotence to increase their misery!

6. The doctrine tends to *weaken confidence in God, and to promote general unbelief, and therefore to promote sin, as the consequence of unbelief.* No sophistication can set aside the indubitable truth, that the very essence of that faith which has a sanctifying influence on the human soul, is *confidence in the character of God.* True faith embraces the Lord Jesus Christ as the gift of the Father's love; and is that by which the soul is drawn into God, and is enabled to overcome the world. There is no distrust or suspicion in this exercise of the mind, which cordially embraces God in his parental goodness; but let the above-mentioned gloomy orthodoxy come over the imagination, and its whole tendency will be of a directly opposite character.

Let this view of the matter be sustained by the authority of two distinguished writers. The first is Dr. Dwight, who says, "We cannot obey God, except from confidence in his character, as a perfectly Wise, Just, and Good Teacher and Lawgiver, who has instructed us in our true interest; a Lawgiver who has prescribed wise, just, and benevolent precepts, to regulate our duty. Unless we consider his precepts *concerning all things to be right*, we can never voluntarily obey them. Confi-

dence, therefore, in the character of God, is the true, and only possible source of that spontaneous obedience, which is acceptable to Him, virtuous in us, and indispensable to all our real good." (Dwight's Theology, Vol. IV. p. 35.)

Now if, without this confidence in the Divine character, "we cannot obey God," if this is the "*only possible source of that spontaneous obedience*, which is acceptable to Him, virtuous in us, and indispensable to all our real good," it clearly follows that sin is never discouraged, and virtuous obedience never produced, by any other apprehension of future punishment, than that which is associated with "*confidence in the character of God*," and with a firm persuasion that "*his precepts concerning all things are right*." Consequently, we must have the full and abiding impression, that his law is as perfectly right and equitable in its *penalties*, as in the *obedience* which it requires. "It is impossible," says Dr. Dwight, "that beings should exercise any of those affections, with which alone they can glorify their Creator, or cordially obey him, *so long as they distrust his Moral Character*. Equally impossible is it, that they should possess the enjoyment which alone can fill the wishes, or is suited to the nature, of an immortal mind." (Vol. IV. p. 37.) Hence it is plain, that to fill the minds of men with views of future punishment which compel them to distrust the Moral Character of God, cannot make them either virtuous or happy, in time or in eternity.

Our next authority is that of Mr. Wesley. He says, "Although there are many that are destroyed by presumption, there are *still more* that perish by *despair*. I mean, by want of hope; by thinking it impossible that they should escape destruction. They are fully convinced they cannot save themselves, and believe God *will* not save them." (Wesley's Works, Vol. VII. p. 44.)

Now those who so fondly shroud a coming eternity with infinite misery, appear to think there is no danger of souls being lost "by *despair*;" but that our only solicitude should be to guard them against *presumption*.

What is *despair*, but want of *confidence* in God? "They are fully convinced they cannot save themselves, and believe God *will* not save them." And why not? Because they have been taught to view him as a Being who takes pleasure in seeing a large amount of misery abound in his creation.

Are there any *Arminians*, who cause souls to be lost "by despair?" I fear this question must be answered in the affirmative: for although they do not, with the Calvinist, fill a *past* eternity with darkness which obscures the glory of the Supreme Being, yet many of them fill a *future* eternity with a similar obscurity. The one says, *from* all eternity God had no other sentiment towards a vast majority of mankind, than an intention to fill them with infinite misery; the other says, that *to* all eternity God *will* have no other sentiment towards a vast majority of mankind, than that of a fixed purpose to fill them with infinite misery. If the Creator now

hates any of his creatures, and has no regard to their well-being, but on the contrary, has an immutable disposition to make them as miserable as possible, the presumption is very strong, that an unchangeable Being, as God is, *always* had the same disposition towards them. How naturally will such a view destroy all *confidence* in God, and fill the inquiring mind with "*despair!*"

"Unless we consider his precepts *concerning all things to be right*, we can never voluntarily obey them." And must not his law be right in its *penalties*, as well as in its *requirements?* If the law demands infinite penalties, why not as well demand infinite obedience? If there is no possibility for the penalty to be too great, then there is no possibility for the demand of obedience to be too great, even though it should be for men to cut themselves with knives and lancets, in imitation of the ancient worshippers of Baal. It appears to be supposed, that when sinners are once in hell, Justice has no limits; but it is an obvious dictate of conscience and of common sense, that Justice can no more inflict unnecessary punishment in eternity, than it can demand unnecessary obedience in time.

7. The last objection we adduce against such a dismal view of futurity, is that it tends to *encourage and increase the tyranny of mankind, and thereby to impede the progress of virtue and true religion.* It is proved by the experience of all ages, that mankind are disposed to imitate the character of the Being whom they wor-

ship; and it is well known that those who have been most ready to devote all heathens to unavoidable destruction, and to consign all heretics to the same fate, have been peculiarly fond of exhibiting the worst kind of future punishment that it is possible for the human mind to imagine.

Mosheim, when treating of the tenth century, says, "The fears of purgatory were now carried to the greatest height, and exceeded by far the terrifying apprehensions of infernal torments; for they hoped to avoid the latter easily, by dying enriched with the prayers of the clergy, or covered with the merits and mediation of the saints; while from the pains of purgatory, there was no exemption. The clergy therefore finding these superstitious terrors admirably adapted to increase their authority, and to promote their interests, used every method to augment them, and by the most pathetic discourses, accompanied by monstrous fables and fictitious miracles, they laboured to establish the doctrine of purgatory and also to make it appear that they had a mighty influence in that formidable region."

This quotation from Mosheim may serve to illustrate two points which deserve our serious attention: first, it shows the policy of tyrants in painting future punishment in the most frightful colours, with a view to build up a temporal dominion, and to exercise an uncontrolled despotism over their fellow-men. Secondly, we hence learn that such gloomy and dark views of a future state, as the papal priesthood exhibited, only produce "super-

stitious terrors," without any salutary influence to bring the sinful soul to true repentance. They may influence men to surrender, as the slaves of ecclesiastical power, but will not lead them to be "*the Lord's free men.*" The Romish clergy wanted a tremendous purgatory by which to govern the faithful within their own borders; and a hell of infinite misery with which to intimidate Heathens and Heretics, and to frighten them into the bosom of the church.

We have said that there are no analogies in nature, to give the least countenance to such awful views of futurity as those above exhibited; and neither are there any such analogies in providence. We shall probably be referred to earthquakes and volcanoes; to storms and inundations; to poisons, stings and death;—as also to war, famine and pestilence. If God be so severe against sinners in this world, it may be said, how much more severe will he be in that which is to come!

The better we become acquainted with the nature and tendency of the punishments inflicted on mankind in the present world, the more clear and satisfactory does the evidence appear, that these judgments of God are directed and regulated by his benevolence. In his severest threatenings against nations, as recorded in the Old Testament, he commonly closes by saying, "They shall know that I am the Lord." And is it not a blessing for any people to know that he is the Lord? "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

When God inflicted a succession of signal punishments upon Egypt, it was for the three-fold purpose of delivering Israel from slavery, demolishing the gods of Egypt, and that his "name might be declared throughout all the earth." The Babylonish captivity was intended both to diffuse a knowledge of the true God among the Heathens, and to subdue the spirit of idolatry in the people of Israel. Dr. Channing, in his letter to the Hon. Henry Clay, says "Religious men in this community are peculiarly bound to read the future history of their country, not in the flattering promises of politicians, but in the warnings of conscience and in the declarations of God's word. They know and should make it known, that nations cannot consolidate free institutions and secure a lasting prosperity by crime. They know that retribution awaits communities as well as individuals; and they should tremble amidst their hopes, when, with this solemn truth on their minds, they look round on their country. Let them consider the clearness with which God's will is now made known, and the signal blessings of his providence poured out on his people; and then let them consider our ingratitude for his boundless gifts, our abuse of his beneficence to sensual and selfish gratification, our unmeasured, unrighteous love of gain, our unprincipled party-spirit, and our faithless and cruel wrongs towards the Indian race; and can they help fearing, that the cup of wrath is filling for this people?" Again, he says, "The invasion of Texas by our citizens, is a mournful comment on our

national morality. Whether without some fiery trial, some signal prostration of our prosperity, we can rise to the force and self-denial of free men, is a question not easily solved." And again: "I trust, indeed, that Providence will beat back and humble our cupidity and ambition. But one guilty success is often suffered to be crowned, as men call it, with greater; in order that a more awful retribution may at length vindicate the justice of God, and the rights of the oppressed."

These quotations are given to show that in the view of this elegant writer, public Judgments of God are designed as "a fiery trial" to cause people "to rise to the force and self-denial of free men;" to "beat back and humble cupidity and ambition;" and to "vindicate the justice of God, and the rights of the oppressed." Now if these and such like ends are to be accomplished by the tremendous punishments which are felt when *the Lord ariseth to shake terribly the earth*, it is plain that goodness is at the helm, and directs the vessel through the whole process of the storm.

If we apply such analogies of nature and providence to the punishments of a future state, they will indeed conduct us to conclusions every way worthy of the Being whom we adore. It will be seen that the same God presides over the destinies of eternity, who has been operating in time; and that too, without any change of principle or of purpose. It will be seen that, as becomes the grandeur and glory of his kingdom, He will through eternity so conduct his administration, as

will be calculated to make the best moral impression on all created minds, with a view to promote the common welfare.

But how different is this from the view too commonly taken of a future state! How low and unworthy of the Divine Mind is the supposition, that the winding up, the ultimatum of all the wisdom and counsels of eternity, will be the establishment of a comparatively small heaven, where the inhabitants will be filled with some kind of a mystical happiness, like vessels are filled with water in a lake; and a very large hell, whose groaning millions will be filled with excruciating and augmenting agony, without intermission and without end! Is this all that a Being of infinite goodness, wisdom and power, is able to do to all eternity? Has he not wisdom enough to form plans which will be more extensively beneficial than this? If he has the ability, and not the will to do it, must it not be either that the abounding of sin and misery is a pleasure to his mind, or that in his judgment evil is better than good, and misery better than happiness? If we believe, on the contrary, that our Maker delights to see his creatures happy, rather than miserable, then, to be consistent, we must maintain that his invariable disposition is to destroy evil; that when he inflicts punishment, it is to subdue vice and immorality, and of course to operate against that which is the first cause of all the misery there is in the creation. As he is "without variableness or shadow of turning," his Judgments are regulated by the same principles in a

future state, that influence his providential acts in the present; and these governing principles will continue the same for ever.

The Bible clearly gives us the following essential principles, and it does not contradict itself:—1. That GOD IS LOVE. 2. That WITH HIM IS NO VARIABLENESS, NEITHER SHADOW OF TURNING. 3. That THERE IS NO RESPECT OF PERSONS WITH GOD. 4. That HE HATETH NOTHING THAT HE HATH MADE. 5. That HE IS LOVING TO EVERY MAN, AND HIS TENDER MERCY IS OVER ALL HIS WORKS. 6. That JUDGMENT IS HIS STRANGE WORK, and that HE DOTH NOT AFFLICT WILLINGLY, NOR GRIEVE THE CHILDREN OF MEN. 7. That HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY, and HAS NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED. 8. That HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, and RENDER UNTO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.—That some shall find their condition MORE TOLERABLE than others, and that there are some who shall be BEATEN WITH FEW STRIPES.

Such is the orthodoxy of Divine revelation; and it gives no authority to draw opposite conclusions, from figurative representations of future punishment; seeing the same figures are employed in its sacred pages in describing the various judgments of God in this world; as the reader will find by turning to the fifth section, third part, of the present volume.

SECTION V.

The Love of God.—Its Obligation universal and unchangeable.

Love is good-will, or a sincere desire that the beloved object may be happy. It is *gratitude* for favours received, with a disposition to make all possible returns to the donor. It is *complacency*, or delight in the character, and pleasure in the society, of the one beloved. Towards a sovereign it is *allegiance*, which implies reverence for his authority, affection for his will, and obedience to his commandments. Towards God it should arise and increase to the utmost extent of devotion, worship, and adoration. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*, with all thy *soul*, with all thy *mind*, and with all thy *strength*. *This is the first and great commandment.*

Now it must be admitted, that God has a perfect right to demand this love from the whole intelligent creation. This perfect right must be founded on what he is in himself, and what he is to them; that is, on the *principles* of his character, and on their invariable *manifestations*. Hence it appears, that there is nothing unlovely in his disposition or in any of his actions; otherwise it would follow that he commands his crea-

tures to *love* that which is *not lovely.* This first and great commandment of God carries in itself a full demonstration, that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

In vain may it be pretended, that he has a right to make this demand on the ground of mere sovereignty; for any claim upon others to *love* an *unlovely character,* is the demand of a tyrant alone. God, we say, is an infinitely great and grand Being. True; because he is infinitely good: for there is no other greatness and grandeur in an evil being, than that which deserves universal contempt. Tyranny and malevolence are essentially little and mean; and it is as impossible to make them great, as to make them lovely. God, we say, is our Creator; and therefore he has a right to our utmost love. True; because the act of creation was an act of infinite good-will, and laid the foundation for all subsequent happiness. But were it possible for an evil and malignant being to create living creatures, in order to deprive them of all happiness, and to make them miserable for ever, they would have no cause to love him; but on the contrary would have a right in perfect justice, to abhor his character to all eternity.

A good character can be proved and known only by its manifestations; and to say there can be any contradiction between the disposition and actions of a perfectly good being, is itself a contradiction: for it is to say, that either the disposition or the action is *good* and *not good,* at the same time.

Whence it follows, that the benevolence of God, *as manifested by all his actions*, is entitled to the supreme love of the whole intelligent creation.

Has our Creator ever done any thing, and will he ever do any thing, to *forfeit* his claim to universal love? Never. All devils and condemned sinners in perdition are under the same *obligation* to love God now, that they ever were. This cannot be successfully denied, unless it can be proved that his treatment of them has been a departure from his original character. If the Divine conduct towards them is and has been perfectly right, then if we say their obligation to love him is diminished, it follows, that a person may lose his claim upon our love *because of his doing right.*

Their obligation being the same, if we say God is not willing that they should love him, our conclusion is that *a good Being* is not willing that others should *love goodness;*—that a *just Being* is unwilling for others to discharge a moral obligation;—and that a *holy Being* is unwilling that others should *love holiness!* The essential foundation of such orthodoxy is that God always had a double character, composed of contrary principles. If it be admitted by all, that *with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*, those who believe he now acts against the inhabitants of hell with hatred and ill-will, are believers in the doctrine, whether they are aware of it or not, that he hated and rèprobated them from all eternity. The view of future punishment which is entertained by thousands of Arminians, and

the Calvinistic doctrine of eternal reprobation, are twin sisters, that can never be put asunder.

If our Maker punishes the inhabitants of hell for their hatred and injustice, and if he at the same time is exercising hatred and injustice against them, then he punishes them *for being like himself.* Whereas the very cause for his punishing them, is that they are *unlike and opposite to himself.* Let us view the two characters in contrast.

Character of God, and of Heaven.	*Character of the Devil, and of Hell.*
1. LOVE.	1. MALICE.
2. SINCERITY.	2. DECEIT.
3. BENEVOLENCE.	3. TYRANNY.
4. IMPARTIALITY.	4. PARTIALITY.
5. JUSTICE.	5. INJUSTICE.
6. COMPASSION.	6. CRUELTY.

Now will any one suppose that God assumes and exercises the characteristics of the lower region, with which to oppose and punish its inhabitants? Does he not himself teach us, that *evil is to be overcome with good?* The Divine weapons are *truth* and *justice:* truth shows to those enemies of God the reality of their deserving all that they receive from their Sovereign and Judge; and justice makes them feel the penalty which truth pronounces upon them. Does not the combined operation of truth and justice tend to *convince* them that they are wrong, and that God is right? Why then are

they not convinced? Because they use the weapons of hell, with which to fight against God. They use *deceit* and *partiality*, with which to turn away truth from their understandings; they use *injustice* and *falsehood*, with which to set aside the rectitude of the Divine conduct towards them; and if they do not diffuse the effects of their *malice* and *tyranny* through all heaven, it is only because they have not the power.

Now if these creatures are compelled to hate God, who is it that compels them? If the operation of his truth and justice upon them excites their resentment, it is plainly because they hate truth and justice. Is it their Maker's will that they should do so? If it be, it is of course his will that they should *love the opposite principles of evil.* Is it their Creator's will, that they should *hate his own character?* If not, then *he does not punish them in order to make them hate him;* nor is there any thing in his administration which gives them the least *excuse* for doing it, or that takes away a tittle of their obligation to love him with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind, and with all their strength.

It may be said, however, that they have lost all ability to love God, and have not power in the least degree to cease from their hatred against him. Has the Bible any where given this information to any man? If not, from what source has any one become *wise above that which is written?*

They are under no other necessity to hate God, than

the fixed habit of their own will; that is, their settled determination that they *will* hate him. Now what can God do that is more directly calculated to alter this settled determination of their will, than to show them by his truth, that his conduct towards them is right, and to make them feel by the operation of his justice, that the habit of their will is utterly wrong? If this shall fail to convince them, is it not plainly because they determine not to be convinced? To say God is not willing they should be convinced, is but to say, in other words, that he employs his truth and justice, on purpose that these attributes may not have their native effects, but may assume the tendency of opposite principles. It is to say, that when he employs good principles to oppose evil, it is neither the *design* nor the *tendency* of this operation to *overcome evil with good*, but on the contrary, *to perpetuate and to increase the evil!* As well might we turn the tables, and say that the *design* of an evil being, and the *tendency* of his evil actions, is *to perpetuate and to increase every thing that is right and good.*

But will not such reasoning result in the conclusion, that at some future period in the great depths of eternity, the malice of hell may be subdued, and both devils and wicked men may cease being at enmity against God? And even if all this should come to pass, who would feel the mighty calamity? Would it be a matter of regret to the mind of the Almighty, that nobody was found any longer to hate him? Among all the traits of a good mind, no one was ever found which *loves to*

be hated. Nor is there any disposition in the inhabitants of heaven to be grieved or offended to witness an abatement in the vice and misery which have been so long abounding in the creation.

It may be said, perhaps, that the great Sovereign will for ever compel the damned to continue wicked, and this will be a part of their punishment. Such a position evidently supposes that the *penalty* inflicted on transgression is a forcible perpetuation of the *crime* that is punished! whence it would appear to follow, that the *sin* and the *penalty* being the same, must originate from the same attributes. This leads us back again to the conclusion, that the Creator reprobated these sinners from all eternity; for if he now establishes sin by his decree, he was originally of the same disposition, seeing *with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

It may be urged, also, that even if sinners in a future state should surrender to truth and justice, they will nevertheless deserve to be punished eternally for the evil which they have already done. This may be true; and yet it may be no less true that they will not deserve as *great* punishment as they would if they should eternally *persist* in their rebellion. Justice itself might require an *abatement* of their misery; and even if *mercy* should do something in favour of subdued rebels, the person who should object to such an exercise of clemency, would be near of kin to His Holiness in St. Peter's Chair. It may be for ever necessary to keep those

outcasts at a distance from the throne of God, and yet a gracious regard may be had to their welfare, so far as shall consist with the interests of universal society. The degrees of punishment may vary, and the modes of treatment be diversified in ten thousand forms, without necessarily supposing that those creatures must be exalted to the highest degrees of felicity and glory enjoyed any where in the creation of God. Though it be improper to elevate them to the highest heavens, among the first-born sons of light, it does not therefore follow that all regard to their well-being must be for ever abandoned.

Mr. Wesley, in addressing the reprobates, on the supposition of eternal predestination, says, "There is no help for you in God. *Your* God! No. He is not yours: he never was; he never will be. He that made you, he that called you into being, has no pity upon you! He made you for this very end, to damn you; to cast you headlong into a lake of fire burning with brimstone! This was prepared for you, or ever the world began! And for this you are now reserved in chains of darkness, till the decree brings forth; till, according to his eternal, unchangeable, irresistible will,

> You groan, you howl, you writhe in waves of fire,
> And pour forth blasphemies *at his desire!*

O God, how long shall this doctrine stand?" (Wesley's Works, Vol. X. p. 145.)

Again in his letter to the Rev. Mr. Hervey, he says,

"But what becomes of *all other people?* They *must inevitably* perish for ever. The die was cast or ever they were in being. The doctrine to *pass them by*, has

> Consigned their unborn souls to hell,
> And damn'd them from their mother's womb!

I could sooner be a Turk, a Deist, yea, an Atheist, than I could believe this. It is less absurd to deny the very being of a God, than to make him an Almighty Tyrant." (Wesley's Works, Vol. X. p. 201.)

The ground on which Mr. Wesley believed that the system of predestination made God "an Almighty Tyrant," was its representing him as having a disposition to delight in the torment of his creatures; from which disposition, he is supposed to have predestinated their sins, as the necessary means of their eternal misery! But if it be said that God now has a disposition to delight in the undiminished anguish of all that are in hell, and hence fixes them under a necessity of sinning, by his own decree, for the sake of perpetuating their misery, will not this make him an Almighty Tyrant, as much as the predestinating system of the Rev. Mr. Hervey? The one doctrine is, that he had an original disposition to *make* sinners, in order to *make* them miserable; the other, that he has now a disposition to *keep* them sinners, in order to *keep* them miserable. If he has such a character now, he always had it; for I must still repeat, *with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

The state of final reprobation exhibited by the two systems, is precisely the same:—*an eternal necessity of sinning, and of enduring invariable or augmenting misery.* One avers that the decree was fixed from all eternity; the other, that it was fixed at the time when the sinner departed out of this world. They both alike represent the Almighty *as having no regard whatever to the well-being of these miserable creatures.*

It may be said, indeed, that on the Anti-predestinarian scheme, sinners *deserve* this dreadful reprobation; because during their life-time they sinned freely, without being compelled to do so by the influence of any decree whatever. But it is difficult to conceive where the proof will be found, that they deserve to be fixed under a decree that will compel them to continue sinning to all eternity, as an essential part of the penalty of the law. If such sins deserve punishment in a future state, they equally deserve it in the present state; but if so, the Calvinist is justified in his conclusion, that though the reprobate in this life sins under the influence of an absolute decree, he nevertheless deserves eternal punishment for his crimes.

That voluntary, obstinate, and unnecessitated sinners, deserve a very dreadful punishment, and even an eternal punishment, is not disputed. But this is not the question. It is, whether they deserve to be punished with a decree that shall *fix on them the eternal necessity of sinning?* and whether there be any *ill desert* in sins brought about in this manner? If not, the question

is, whether sinners in eternity who may some time or other "consent unto the law that it is good," and acknowledge the justice of God towards them, will deserve as *much* punishment, as they would, if they should voluntarily, and without necessity, persevere in their malignant hostility.

Such inquiries may be called vain speculations; but surely it is not a vain thing to labour to make it appear that God our Creator is really deserving our confidence and love. It is worse than vain for men to enjoin silence, or to turn away their ears from the truth, in order to support and keep in countenance such awful misrepresentations of the Divine Being as those just mentioned; and not Mr. Wesley alone, but any rational man whatever, "could sooner be a Turk, a Deist, yea, an Atheist," than to embrace a scheme of doctrine which represents *the Father of the spirits of all flesh* as "an Almighty Tyrant." If this is worse than Atheism, as Mr. Wesley believed it to be, it is consequently worse than any other doctrine or heresy that ever was invented in any age or nation; and it is no less our duty to abandon the concomitants of this doctrine, than it is to reject the hypothesis itself with which they are necessarily connected.

The world has been taught that the enmity of sinners against God can never cease, because an incurable corruption of will is fixed in them, as a penalty of the Divine law. This penalty is said to be threefold:—death *temporal*, *spiritual*, and *eternal;* the whole of which

was incurred by Adam in Paradise, and by all his posterity in him. "For them he was to stand his probation, or for them to fall, and entail the penalty of the violated law. As *a part of the threatened penalty*, they are shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin." See a late work entitled "Difficulties of Arminian Methodism," pp. 74, 75. This "iniquity" and "sin" in which they were conceived, it appears, causes them to deserve the second death, and will make that death eternal, by keeping the soul under the bond of necessary corruption.

Now from this doctrine it follows: 1. That the *penalty* of God's law, *is sin.* 2. That it is *unavoidable* sin —having been put into the souls of Adam's children before they were born. 3. That a person suffering one penalty of law, thereby deserves another penalty. If *spiritual death* is a crime, which is one part, why is not *temporal death* also a crime, it being another part of the penalty? It would seem, that sin is an essential part of the whole judicial process—that Adam's children are first guilty of sin in being born in his likeness; secondly, in dying a temporal death; and thirdly, their suffering eternal death, the last part of the penalty, is their final and finishing *crime.* If one portion of the threefold curse is *sin*, the others must be of a similar character; and of course, the *sin* and the *penalty* being of the same nature, must have proceeded from the same kind of fountain.

Such is the foundation on which the conclusion rests, that all sinners in perdition must *necessarily continue at*

enmity against God for ever. Their unchangeable corruption is fixed and settled in them, as a penalty of God's law! Persons who believe this, ought to reflect a little on the following dilemma: those in a state of future punishment are still under moral obligation to love and obey God, or they are not; if they are *not*, it must be because their Creator has done something to forfeit his right to their love and obedience; if they *are*, then it follows, upon the hypothesis before us, that God by his action, through the penalty of his law, *hinders them from discharging a moral obligation.* And because he does this, *therefore* he determines that their punishment shall be eternal! This doctrine of necessary sin, as a penalty of law, is an essential part of the system which was baptized and confirmed by the Synod of Dort; with that system it must stand or fall; and with it must stand or fall the long-cherished doctrine of infinite punishment.

SECTION VI.

Rejoicing in the Lord.—Complacency in his entire Character and Government.

Our Saviour says, "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." (John xiv. 1.) This supposes there is a sufficiency in God, as manifested to the world in Jesus Christ, when his character is credited, to remove all trouble from the human heart. Again, we are commanded to *rejoice evermore*, and *in every thing* to *give thanks;* which plainly implies, that *all that God is*, affords cause for *perpetual* rejoicing, and *all that he does*, is a ground for eternal *gratitude;* because it is all right, and gracious, and beneficial. For it is certain that he does not require us to *give thanks* for any thing that is *not good*, or to rejoice in that which is *evil.* The apostle exultingly exclaims, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." (Phil. iv. 4.)

The conclusion therefore is, that the character of the Supreme Being constitutes a perfect foundation for unceasing and eternal joy; and that there is nothing in him, or in his dispensations, of a contrary nature or tendency. Hence the whole intelligent universe is under moral obligation, to rejoice in the character of the Creator, and in all the divine operations proceeding from that character.

Why are we glad that God is *Almighty?* Because He is *Almighty Goodness.* Why are we delighted that *His understanding is Infinite?* Because it is the understanding of *Infinite Love.* Why are we pleased when we hear that God is *Unchangeable?* Because it brings to our view a *Benevolence which will never vary.* And why do we rejoice that he is *Just?* Because we hence learn, that the Energy of Love will never cease to maintain and defend every thing that is right, and to oppose every thing that is wrong.

Let us look into this subject, that we may correctly understand the happiness of heaven. If saints and angels should rejoice merely because they themselves are happy, without regard to the PRINCIPLE on which their happiness rests, and without any concern for the well-being of others, would not this be a *selfish enjoyment?* So far from being disinterested benevolence, it would not have the character of *social love;* but on the contrary would be embodied selfishness, or sectarian partiality. Its language would be, WE, the Faithful, are saved: no matter how many Heathens and Heretics are damned.

Nothing can inspire intelligent confidence but good principle; and this is the same when condemning the wicked, that it is in justifying the righteous. If the saints are saved in such a way that they know not why, by some unaccountable preference in the Divine Mind from all eternity, their confidence in the perpetuity of their own bliss, must rest on a divine process which is

enveloped in impenetrable obscurity. How is it possible for *mystery* and *darkness* to afford equal satisfaction and assurance to intelligent minds, with the clear light of a righteous and benevolent system of moral government?

The Divine penalties are fitted in the most perfect manner to beat back the powers of evil, to hold them in check, and thereby to prevent their malignant ravages; and these penalties apply to each particular offender, in exact proportion to the amount of his turpitude and hostility. Any change in the essential action of such a government would be wrong, and would jeopardise the common welfare.

Hence the saints and angels of immortality *rejoice in the Lord's vengeance;* because they see it is the action of a holy principle, avenging the rights of innocence, and defending the happiness of virtue, throughout the whole universe.

But if holy spirits in heaven have no such views as these—if they know only that the damned are inconceivably miserable, and will remain so without intermission, merely because such is the Sovereign will—then in being called upon to "rejoice in the Lord always," they would be required to rejoice simply in *obscurities* and *mysteries.* What a reluctant and forced kind of enjoyment this must be! They must be resigned to a will which they do not understand, and rejoice in a process that puzzles all the faculties of their mental being! It seems, in short, that all their happiness, and

confidence, and hope, and complacency, must be based upon profound mysteries of darkness, and not upon those of light and love. Sympathy with the sufferings of others is removed from the minds of evil beings, in these two ways: either by a *malignity* which *rejoices* in the misery of their fellow-creatures, or by a *selfishness* which makes them *indifferent* to it. Will this be the disposition of heaven? Is it the only way in which a painful sympathy can be removed from the minds of its inhabitants?

Inquietude is removed from virtuous minds, when they see their fellow-creatures in misery, by a clear conviction that the punishment is not cruel or unnecessary. Suppose a man is arrested and convicted, who has spent a quarter of a century in perpetrating a succession of robberies and murders: to put him to death by hanging would not excite any painful sympathy; because he would deserve it, and the public welfare would require it; but if coals of fire should be applied to his feet, and be removed and applied again and again, on purpose to keep him in lingering torment as long as life could be kept in him under such a process, this would be a painful sight to every virtuous spectator; because it would be cruel and unnecessary. Or when a criminal is consigned to the Penitentiary, no sympathy is excited by seeing him deprived of liberty, taken away from his wife and children, fastened with chains, or secured under bolts and bars; for this is all necessary to bind down the evil, and to protect the rights of

unoffending citizens; but if prisoners in the Penitentiary were made to undergo all the modes of torture invented in the Romish Inquisition, none but malignant beings could rejoice in a government that would inflict penalties of this sort, or any of a like cruel character.

Secondly, there must be a conviction equally clear, that punishment in all instances is duly proportioned to the amount of guilt. When this is done, as God says it shall be done under his government, it plainly proceeds upon the principle that punishment in no case shall be unnecessarily severe; for if no regard were had to this matter, what need would there be for any such apportionment?

We may observe, thirdly, that in so far as a sinner yields and "consents unto the law that it is good," in that proportion the moral causes for his punishment are removed; if therefore nothing should ever be done for the relief of such, it must be either because their Maker *could* not relieve them, or because he *would* not: and in either case, it would seem to be rather a difficult matter for the heavenly hosts to *rejoice in the Lord always*, on account of his *want of ability*, or *want of will*, to diminish the miseries of subdued and penitent sinners.

It is often said with great assurance, that there is no repentance in hell; and it seems to be taken for granted that this unqualified maxim is sufficiently authoritative, to silence all further inquiry. We have no evidence, indeed, that in a future state repentance is ever granted as a gospel privilege, whereby condemned sinners may

be brought into the Christian covenant, and made sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ; but if any man shall affirm that all repentance is there *forbidden*, we may justly require something more than his ipse dixit, before we yield our assent to such a singular proposition. This is a favourite hypothesis, which, far from having any foundation to rest upon, presumptuously assumes that God will punish his creatures for being wicked, and at the same time be unwilling that they should repent of their wickedness! It is either true that those sinners *ought* to repent, or that they *ought not;* if they *ought* to repent, then to say our Maker forbids or hinders it, is to say he is unwilling his creatures should discharge their duty; but if they *ought not* to repent, it follows that, some how or other, their obligation to do it is cancelled, and it is consequently right for them eternally to continue in a state of impenitency.

If it be admitted, that God is willing for all sinners to repent, it must be equally admitted that he is willing for them to be *sincere* in their repentance; for the notion of a deceitful repentance, is an absurdity and a contradiction, and will involve the consequence, that the Almighty Creator really desires, either that his creatures should maintain a spirit of undeviating hostility against him, or that all their efforts to cease from their rebellion, should be mere efforts of hypocrisy.

If these consequences be rejected, as they will by every ingenuous mind, we must of course admit, that in case any sinners in a future state should sincerely

repent, the moral state of their minds being vastly different from that of those who continue in a course of unyielding malignity against the character and government of God, the sentiments of the heavenly hosts towards the former, will give rise to a feeling of sympathy, which would necessarily interrupt their happiness, unless the Divine administration should be seen to make a corresponding difference in the condition of those subdued and yielding sinners. To see creatures mourning over their corruption, abhorring themselves for their criminality, and longing to return to their allegiance, at the same time bound down by inexorable vengeance under a fatal necessity of an eternal and undiminished endurance of pain, would amaze and puzzle the intelligence of heaven, and make it morally impossible for either saints or angels to rejoice in the character and government of the Supreme Being.

That we ought to be modest in our reasonings and conclusions, when speaking of the actions and dispensations of the great Maker and Judge of mankind, is fully admitted; and the sacredness of our obligation to guard against presumptuous imaginations, is appreciated and solemnly felt by the writer; but it ought to be considered, that presumptuous conclusions on the side of vengeance are equally untenable, with those on the other hand, and are far more insulting and reproachful to the great Ruler of the world.

It is not supposed that it would be essential to the perfect tranquillity of heaven, for its inhabitants to have

a full knowledge of all the events that will ever occur under the Divine government; but a clear conviction of these three things, will probably be essential to uninterrupted confidence and peace: First, that *God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.* Secondly, that He is *immutably disposed* to employ his wisdom, power, goodness, truth and justice, to extend holiness and happiness as far as created agents will consent for them to be extended; or in other words, to make every creature holy and happy that is willing to be made so. And thirdly, that there is no attribute in his nature which will influence him ever to lay a restraint upon the will of any creature, with the view of impelling that creature finally to choose wrong, or of hindering it from ultimately choosing right.

Let these principles shine without a cloud through the heavenly regions, and all will be quietness and peace. But if the contrary of these, or of any one of them, be justly and truly predicated of the Almighty, I see not how the hosts of heaven can help doubting the rectitude of their Creator, and fearing that there is uncertainty and hazard in their own condition.

An essential characteristic of charity, is that it "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;" consequently, if there were any thing *inequitable* in an action of the divine government, it would be impossible for the charity of heaven to rejoice in it. A *holy* disposition is essentially a *benevolent* one; its mental delight must therefore arise from a source which is opposite to

that of the wicked man, whose disposition being malevolent, is gratified in seeing others in a state of misery. Of course, the benevolence of heavenly spirits cannot rejoice in any action of the divine government which produces misery, on any other ground than a clear conviction that it is purely intended to restrain evil, to diminish and to subdue it, and invariably to operate in favour of goodness and happiness. The heavenly hosts must clearly perceive this, in order to their tranquillity; for how can they *rejoice in the truth*, as the word of God says charity does, without having it made manifest to their understandings, that truth is always salutary in its influence?

If we suppose them to *rejoice in the Lord always*, because the Lord always employs his almighty power to fill the millions of the damned with the uttermost force of absolute misery, this will represent them as being animated with the disposition which shouted around the funeral pile of dying heretics, as they groaned and expired in the flames. It will represent them as having a joy that results from the great deep of moral evil in their own souls, and which triumphs in the reign of a Sovereign who is believed by them to be essentially of the same character. As such a conclusion is too absurd to be admitted, the only remaining alternative appears to be, that they will rejoice in the Lord always, because he will always employ his power, wisdom, goodness, truth, and justice, in doing to all eternity the

very best that can be done for the welfare of his whole intelligent creation.

This conclusion may appear too bold for me to hazard, without sustaining it by authority, as well as by argument. I invite attention, then, to Dr. Dwight's sermon, entitled "Utility the foundation of Virtue," in the third volume of his Theology, p. 160, where he says, "The whole tendency of virtue is to promote happiness; and this is its only ultimate tendency. It prefers, of course, the greater happiness to the less, and the greatest, always, to that which can exist in a subordinate degree. It diffuses happiness every where, and to every being capable of receiving it, so far as this diffusion is in its power. In this respect it knows no distinction of family, country, or world. To do good, is its *happiness*, as well as its *tendency*. It will, therefore, never be inattentive, never discouraged, *never disposed to relax its efforts*."

This is the account which he gives of the essential nature of virtue. But its essential nature operates in the Divine Mind, in unchangeable and infinite perfection. Therefore the Divine Mind "prefers the greatest happiness, always, to that which can exist in a subordinate degree,—and diffuses happiness *to every being capable of receiving it, so far as this diffusion is in its power*." Consequently there is no disposition in Deity to take away any creature's capacity for happiness, or to bind it down under chains of eternal sin, as the necessary means of eternal misery.

But the character of God, for which I am contending, it may be said, implies that He will allow sinners to have a state of probation, in a future world. They may never, I reply, have a state of probation in which they will be made eligible to that kingdom where "*the children of the resurrection are equal to angels;*" and yet may peradventure be made eligible to a condition somewhat more tolerable than that of unintermitting and infinite agony.

But I must not venture even upon a hint of this kind, without also entrenching myself behind the ramparts of authority. The Rev. Richard Watson, on the internal evidence of Christianity, in which his object is to show that reason supports the doctrines of the Bible, says, "The existence of man is never to cease. It follows then from this, that either the future trials to be allowed to those who in the present life have been incorrigible, are to be limited in number, or, should they successively fail, are to be repeated for ever. If this cannot be maintained, is there sufficient reason to conclude, that all to whom trial after trial is supposed to be afforded in new and varied circumstances, in order to multiply the probabilities, so to speak, of their final recovery from rebellion, will be at length reclaimed? Before this can be answered, it must be recollected, that a state of suffering which would compel obedience, if we should suppose mere suffering capable of producing this effect, or an exertion of *influence* upon the understanding and will which shall necessitate a definite choice, is neither

of them to be assumed as entering into the circumstances of any new state of trial. Every such future trial, to be probationary at all, must *substantially* be like the present, though its circumstances may vary. We have no right in this argument to imagine to ourselves a future condition where the influence of every circumstance will be to render vice most difficult to commit, and virtue most difficult to avoid; for this would not be a state of *trial:* and if in this present life, men have obstinately resisted all admonitions from heaven, it is most reasonable to conclude, that a part of them at least would abuse successive trials, and frustrate their intention. What then is to become of them? If probation be appointed, it implies accountability, and that judicial decision, in the case of the incorrigible, *punishment.* Whenever then the trial, or the series of trials, terminates as to these *immortal* beings, the subsequent punishment, of whatever kind it be, must be *eternal.* The eternal duration of future punishments, as to the obstinately wicked, must follow; and its accordance with the principles just mentioned, is its rational evidence. (Theological Institutes, pp. 109, 110.)

Here it is plainly supposed by the Rev. Mr. Watson, that a "series of trials" *may* be granted to mankind in a future world; and that the punishment of none but those who "would abuse successive trials," and who would continue "obstinately wicked," will be eternal. He plainly tells us, that it is only in "accordance with the principles just mentioned," that the Scripture doc-

trine of eternal punishment can be supported by "rational evidence."—It being a clear principle of reason, that if God can enlarge happiness, and diminish misery, by "future successive trials," he has a right to do so, and is not lacking in a sufficiently benevolent disposition.

It might be reasonably supposed, indeed, if this life were the only probation for happiness that *any* sinners are to have to eternity, that they would be placed nearer upon an equality, both as to the advantages of their probation, and the time of its continuance, than they are in the present world. In the time of a flood, an earthquake, the discharge of a volcano, or a hurricane at sea, many little sinners of eight, ten, or twelve years of age, are hurried into eternity without a moment's warning. Shall their juvenile probation of three or four years, stand against that of an old hardened rebel of four score? Because the boy of ten years old has suddenly died in his sins, is there some dire necessity in nature and in fate, that his probation for happiness must be cut off to all eternity? Has the Almighty no *right* to give him another trial, in any period of infinite duration? or has he no *power* to do it? If he has the *right*, and the *power*, and the *privilege*, and the *will* to do it, who will presume to put his *negative* upon our Creator's high and supreme dominion?

I am not authorised, however, to enter into the details of eternity; or to adopt any definite and particular conclusions in regard to the successive events of futuri-

ty. It is enough for us to know, that God is the greatest, and wisest, and most benevolent Being, that ever did or can exist: and that his ways will be found to be as much above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts, as the heavens are above the earth.

SECTION VII.

Objections considered.

Obj. 1. "The doctrine of future punishment is founded on the authority of the Bible; therefore all modifications of the subject, by subtle reasonings, are unwarrantable, and are but so many forms of infidelity."

In replying to this objection we must admit, first, that the threatenings contained in the Bible, are indeed very alarming; and secondly, that we are bound to submit to this authority in full, and not in part only. But we are to "search the Scriptures, comparing spiritual things with spiritual," and to draw our conclusions accordingly; which is a direct process of reasoning. To affirm that the Scriptures teach any thing which is contrary to reason, is but to say, in other words, that the Bible is an unreasonable book; and that men must do violence to their rational faculties, in order to be Christians.

It is a first principle of reason, that both sides of a direct contradiction cannot be true; the Bible does not require of us to surrender this principle; it therefore allows us to reject any doctrine which would make our Creator contradict himself.

Figurative language is not to be so taken, as to contradict clearly revealed doctrines; it is a clear doctrine of revelation that *God is love*, and that *he hateth nothing that he hath made;* therefore any views of future punishment which suppose him to act upon the principle of *malevolence*, are evidently delusive. Any doctrine which necessarily supposes him to have pleasure in the death of the wicked, and to be unwilling for any of his creatures to do right, is as unscriptural as it is unreasonable. It is a clear doctrine of revelation, that *God will judge the world in righteousness*, and that there shall be exactly the same degrees in punishment, that there are in moral turpitude; therefore any tenet which is irreconcilable with this doctrine, has no foundation in the holy Scriptures. Mr. Saurin, speaking of degrees of punishment, says, "I have often observed with astonishment the little use, that Christians in general make of this article, since the doctrine itself is taught in Scripture in the clearest manner. When we speak of future punishment, we call it all hell indifferently, and without distinction. We conceive of all the wicked as precipitated into the same gulph, loaded with the same chains, devoured by the same worm. We do not seem to think, there will be as much difference in their state

as there had been in their natural capacities, their exterior means of obtaining knowledge, and their various aids to assist them in the pursuit of it. To how many difficulties have men submitted by not attending to this doctrine of degrees of punishment! — Above all, the doctrine of degrees of punishment elucidates that of the eternity of them. Take this principle, which Scripture establishes in the clearest manner; press home all its consequences; extend it as far as it can be carried; give scope even to your imagination, till the punishments which such and such persons suffer in hell are reduced to a degree, that may serve to solve the difficulty of the doctrine of their eternity." (Saurin's Sermon on Hell.)

This great man owned, as every intelligent and candid man will own, that the doctrine of the eternity of future punishment has a "difficulty" attending it, which makes us feel the necessity of some clear principle with which to "solve" it. The doctrine of degrees of punishment is one principle of this kind. The benevolent rectitude of the divine government, which never *hinders* creatures from repenting and doing right, and which never punishes them *unnecessarily*, is another.

Particular passages of Scripture, indeed, taken unconnected with the general theme of the Bible, would seem to support all that is contended for in regard to the infinity of future punishment; but the doctrine of eternal reprobation can be proved in the same way, and with the same success. Esau was hated, and Jacob

loved, before they were born. The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and raised him up for the purpose of showing forth his power in his destruction. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. These and several other extracts, taken by themselves, with no regard to the connection in which they stand, or to the theme on which the inspired writers were discoursing, or to the first principles of revealed religion, will as fully prove the doctrine of absolute reprobation, as any passages in the Bible will prove the infinity of eternal punishment. Indeed, the patrons of the former doctrine are commonly the firmest advocates of the latter; and in this they are consistent; for the two systems run into one, and maintain the unity of the divine character: namely, that from eternity to eternity God has no other regard to a vast proportion of his creatures, than to employ his almighty energy in filling them with infinite misery. If this be his disposition through a *future* eternity, it is no difficult matter to believe he was the same through a *past* eternity; and if I mistake not, the same mode of argument that would lead to the one conclusion, will equally support the other also.

Obj. 2. "Heaven and hell are an even contrast: as the one is eternal happiness, so the other is eternal misery; as the one is *infinite*, so is the other; if one may end, or be limited, modified or diminished, so may the other also: therefore all attempts to disprove the

infinity of hell torments, are treason against heavenly happiness."

Ans. This objection supposes that happiness is founded on misery, and depends upon it for its perpetuity, and for all its modifications. If this be true, it will follow, that had sin never been introduced by angels or men, the Almighty would have been compelled to make a portion of them miserable, in order to make the others happy. If sin only could introduce misery, and if misery was necessary to happiness, then sin was essential to happiness, by producing misery as its only foundation. The truth of the matter is far otherwise. All that sin ever did, or could do, was to destroy happiness and to produce misery. All that God has done in relation to the matter, and all that he ever will do, is to use the best means to restrain sinners, to reform them, or to punish them when they refuse to be reformed, so far as shall be necessary to hinder them from destroying the good which they otherwise would destroy.

That hell will not be as full of misery as heaven is of happiness, may be proved by the two following plain and clear arguments:

First, the Bible says God *delighteth in mercy*, and that *judgment is his strange work;* consequently, he is immutably more disposed to communicate happiness than to inflict punishment, the former being much more pleasant than the latter to every benevolent mind.

Secondly, heavenly happiness is the gift of free grace. "Benevolence is *more* than justice, injustice is *less;*"

therefore it is right to bestow more happiness on the inhabitants of heaven than they deserve; but to inflict more punishment on the inhabitants of hell than they deserve, would be wrong. Penal sufferings may be made less than the culprit deserves, by an act of mercy, provided no injury be thereby done to others; but they cannot be made greater, without a plain violation of the clear principles of justice and equity.

Obj. 3. "Men are influenced to modify and lower down the common view of future punishment by a secret love of sin. They indulge some secret vice which they are unwilling to relinquish; and hence their desire to establish moderate anticipations of future misery, in their own defence."

Ans. That there is a great propensity in our nature to invent excuses for our sins, and to remove restraints from our indulgencies, must be admitted; but the above objection is based upon a false assumption. It assumes that a good man, who has no longer any love of sin, will have no concern about future misery, however tremendous it may be supposed to be, because of his own individual security from the danger; which supposes a holy Christian to be one of the most *selfish* beings in existence. Will he have no concern for the honour and glory of his Creator's character? Will he have no concern about his neighbours, his parents, his brothers and sisters, and his wife and children, provided his own dear *self* shall be secure from the danger? Should a Christian find evidence to support a strong probable conclu-

sion, that there will be a less amount of misery through a coming eternity than he had apprehended, will he be grieved at the discovery, and feel unwilling to give such evidence a candid consideration? To answer in the affirmative, is manifestly to suppose that *benevolence is not an essential attribute of the Christian character.*

Besides: there are more ways of gratifying a selfish principle, than removing restraints from our sensuality. Sectarian partiality and the desire for ecclesiastical dominion, are equally selfish, and equally strong; and if I mistake not, these last have generated the desire to fill the world with frightful images of a tremendous hell, more than all other causes put together. This is the precise reason why the different *degrees* of punishment in a future state, and all other considerations of this sort, have been so commonly left out of sight. Mr. Saurin need not to "have often observed with astonishment the little use, that Christians in general make of this article, since the doctrine itself is taught in Scripture in the clearest manner." This fact is easily accounted for, and the mystery easily solved, by the general desire to hold forth a most terrifying image of hell, with which to lengthen the cords, and strengthen the stakes, of sectarian influence and ecclesiastical power. Take from them this engine, or weaken its influence over vulgar minds, and they will become as eloquent against *heresy*, as was Demetrius the silversmith in the days of the apostle Paul.

Obj. 4. "Attempts to modify future punishments, or

to conceive any kind of limits to them, is to question the *sovereignty* of God; which is a high presumption in any man, and a direct insult to Divine Majesty."

Ans. Sovereignty is supreme governing authority. God has sovereign authority to rule the universe, according to the perfect principles of his wisdom, goodness and justice. This government of wisdom, goodness and justice, I have been contending for throughout; therefore I have been uniformly maintaining the Divine Sovereignty.

Again: the claim of authority to govern in *opposition* to the principles of wisdom, goodness and justice, constitutes the sovereignty of a tyrant; but God is not a tyrant; therefore I have said nothing against the sovereignty of God.

Obj. 5. "To lower down, in any way, the tremendous penalty of the law, is to depreciate the work of *redemption*, and consequently, to degrade the Divine Saviour of the world. If we are exposed to none other than a *little hell*, we need only a *little Redeemer*."

Ans. Without entering into legal questions on this subject, I will simply state, what few if any will venture to deny, that a full and perfect redemption procures for sinners as much favour and mercy, as can consist with the common welfare of the creation. To say it should procure *more* than this, would represent it as promoting injustice, by inflicting injury upon the creation; and to say it should procure *less*, would be manifestly depreciating the efficacy and value of redemption, and

consequently, degrading the Redeemer. Has the Lord Jesus Christ procured as much favour for sinners, as I have supposed? If he *has*, what Redeemer could do more? If he has *not*, then it appears to follow, that we needed a *greater* Redeemer than he, one that could do *more* for the promotion of happiness, than he has been able to do. If the objector shall affirm that the Saviour did *not* do as much for sinners as I have stated, he falls directly upon the point of his own objection, by supposing the Lord Jesus Christ to be too *little a Redeemer* to do all that was necessary to be done for the intelligent universe. Is it not desirable to have as much favour and mercy extended to sinners as will accord with the common welfare? A negative answer will involve the consequence, that happiness is not so desirable as misery. Will a man say we *degrade* the Redeemer, by believing that he did all that *could* be done, for the general happiness? And that he *exalts* the Redeemer, by affirming that he did *less* for the general happiness, than *might* have been done? Such logic needs an extraordinary kind of an expounder, to make it in any degree intelligible.

Some appear to think the greatness of the atonement consisted, not in what it actually has done, and will do, in delivering sinners from their sin and misery; but in what it is *capable* of doing. It has *merit* enough, we are told, to do wonders; but this merit was not intended to be applied, except to a very limited extent. But we must be permitted to ask, would the God and Father

of our Lord Jesus Christ devise a plan whereby his well-beloved Son should endure excruciating agonies, to procure a large fund of merit that was never to be applied, and of course never to be of any use? The prophet Isaiah was taught, that "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." I imagine nothing less would satisfy the benevolent Redeemer, than to see as much done in behalf of sinners, as can consist with the common welfare of the creation.

If "Redemption was creation more sublime," as Dr. Young says, we may well suppose its influence extends over the whole creation; and that too, for the purpose of procuring as much grace and mercy for sinners, as can be made to consist with the common welfare. Does any theologian wish it to be more *limited* than this, in order that redemption, by accomplishing *less*, may exalt and magnify the Redeemer *more?* If so, I must confess my utter inability to comprehend the nature and mystery of his system.

Obj. 6. "All doctrines of future punishment, except that which teaches its infinity, tend to lower our apprehensions of *the great evil and turpitude of sin;* and consequently to promote sin, and to operate against true repentance and reformation."

Ans. Sin is truly an enormous evil, and the doctrine which I advocate is that alone which proves it to be such. First, it is so great an evil, that it produces misery and that only. Were it necessary, directly or indirectly,

to the support of happiness, it would not be so great an evil as it is on the ground for which I contend.

Secondly, it is a great and an unmixed evil, because it is entirely unnecessary to the display of the Divine glory, or to any other useful or honourable purpose. Had it been decreed or predestinated by our Creator, it would hence appear that there is something valuable in it, and that it is not so great an evil as I suppose it to be.

Thirdly, it is a great evil, because that, in principle, it is opposed to the whole character of God. The internal characteristics of sin are *deceit*, *selfishness*, *malevolence*, *cruelty*. All these are totally contrary to what God is; and of course sin is a greater evil than it would be, if it had any *likeness* to him.

Fourthly, it is a great evil, because it is at *war* with God: it is *enmity* against him. Now the more perfectly *good*, and *true*, and *just*, and *merciful*, we conceive our Heavenly Father to be, the greater is the evil which wars against him. Were he a compound of contrary attributes, sin against him would be only *half* so great an evil as it now is. Being at enmity with the *God of love*, it is at war with the *fountain of all happiness*, which implies malignity against the well-being of universal society.

Fifthly, sin is an enormous evil, because it is an obstinate and persevering rebellion against a *forbearance*, *pity*, and *compassion*, which is reluctant to punish the sinner—against that *bleeding love* which pleads for his soul—and against that *righteous Father*, who in his

sovereign administration never will exercise any kind or degree of rigour, beyond the strict necessity of the case. Were he a different kind of ruler, more unrelenting and severe, sin against him would not be so great an evil as it is.

Finally, sin is an enormous evil, because it is committed against the *authority* of God, and because *he does not will its continuance.* If he did not will its continuance in time, but does will its continuance in eternity, is it because the dreadful evil has changed its character, and become partly a good thing? Does he not hate it as much now as he ever did? If he does, we may justly conclude that he operates as constantly as ever against its diffusion and its perpetuity.

Obj. 7. "All such subtle reasonings about future punishment are *vain speculations;* and it would be much more becoming to employ our time in examining how we may *escape* hell, than how our arguments may seem to diminish its horrors."

Ans. This whole investigation tends to show us how we may escape hell, which evidently is by *exercising confidence in the character of God*, and by constantly *imbibing* and *imitating* that character. If, by neglecting such inquiries and reflections, we suffer our minds to settle down in confused and false views of our Maker's disposition, these consequences will follow: First, our confidence in him will be wavering and unsettled; secondly, suspicions against him will arise in our minds, and we shall mentally impeach his character; thirdly, by viewing him as being only in part excel-

lent, we shall imitate him only in part; or fourthly, by following him fully, while we believe him to be partial, rigorous and implacable, we shall cultivate these dispositions in ourselves, in imitation of him.

Now in one or more of these ways, incorrect views of the character of God will have a corrupting and pernicious influence upon the human spirit. Is this the way to prepare for future happiness? Most certainly it is not. How then can those be justly called vain speculations, which are directly calculated to guard us against such injurious influences, and to cause us to imbibe others which will draw us into the love of God, and into holy longings of heart to be partakers of his Divine nature? I view the doctrine which is advocated in these pages as being the most interesting and practical that was ever contemplated by the mind of man. On it depends all faith, all hope, all reverence, all love, and all obedience. And these weighty considerations ought not to be disregarded under pretence that the simple fear of hell is to accomplish every thing.

Obj. 8. "We must take man as he is, and not as he may be represented by theoretical speculators; and let philosophers and metaphysicians say what they can, it is a fact that the race of Adam will not be restrained from sin, except by the most powerful counteracting influences: deep diseases require strong remedies; and no matter by what mode of reasoning we weaken the terrors of the law, the consequence will be, an increase of vice and immorality."

Ans. That human nature, in its fallen state, has in it an immense amount of absurdity, cannot indeed be denied. We are compelled into the humiliating conclusion, that fallen man is emphatically a fool; but the present objection supposes he must be saved as a fool; whereas the Bible tells us he is to be saved by becoming *wise unto salvation.*

The process must be begun, however, while man is in his foolish state; and how can this be done, except by the simple force of fear? This simple force, it is true, may often make the first impression, which, being followed by other impressive considerations, will eventuate in full salvation; but those subsequent influences being essential to the ultimate result, the motive of fear must not be made so strong as to undermine the truths on which all other motives depend; for if so, the final accomplishment of the object will be prevented. The sinner will be alarmed and terrified, but what will this avail, if he should not be saved? And cannot the sinner's mind be sufficiently alarmed, without such a representation as will leave no distinction between goodness and malignity?

Mr. Saurin says, "If, instead of a punishment enduring for ever, hell were only the suffering of a thousand years' torments, were the sufferer during these thousand years only placed in the condition of a man excruciated with the gout or the stone; must not a man give up all claim to common sense, before he could, even on these suppositions, abandon himself to sin? Are not all the

charms employed by the devil to allure us to sin absorbed in the idea of a thousand years' pain, to which, for argument's sake, we have supposed eternal punishment reduced? How pitiable is a man in dying agonies, who has nothing to oppose against the terrors of death but this opinion! Perhaps hell may be less in degree, and shorter in duration than the scriptures represent!" (Saurin's sermon on hell.)

How plain is it, according to Mr. Saurin's illustrations, that the doctrine of eternal punishment itself is not essential to the true motive of fear, on any human mind, except the mind of a simpleton who is compelled to "give up all claim to common sense!" This he must do, as Mr. Saurin thought, "before he could abandon himself to sin," under the prospect of "only the sufferings of a thousand years." Then if we could prevail on mankind to exercise "common sense," the duration of future punishment might itself be limited, without any danger to the morals of society; and of course its intensity need not be extravagantly magnified, for the mere purpose of filling a weak imagination with terror and dismay.

The conclusion is, in short, that the only ground on which the great necessity of perpetuating the doctrine of infinite punishment can be sustained, is that mankind through life can only be governed as irrational beings, who "must give up all claim to common sense." It seems, too, that they will continue to be the same silly creatures to all eternity; for it is represented that it

will be necessary to continue the same hell of undiminished misery for ever, to keep the inhabitants of heaven themselves from apostatizing, and running away from the great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls! If such dogmas as these be not "vain speculations," and worse than vain, I have mistaken the nature of moral principles, and of the necessary qualifications to become good subjects of our Creator's heavenly government.

Human nature is a great deep; and is very acute in turning away the force of motives, however influential they may appear to be. The objection before us gratuitously assumes that when men are firm believers in the doctrine of infinite punishment, this faith will of course restrain them from sin; but facts have too abundantly contradicted this theory, to allow it to have any weight with reflecting minds. Men who heartily believe this doctrine, and especially those who are *fond* of it, commonly take for granted with great assurance, that they themselves will certainly be of the number who will be saved from this tremendous punishment. Hence it has little or no influence upon their fears, but excites and gratifies other and very different passions of the heart. The pleasure they will have in viewing the immense contrast between their future condition and that of outcast reprobates in hell; the satisfaction of seeing their enemies and antagonists, and especially *heretics*, receive a full cup of torment for their opposition to them and to the creed of their party;—these and such like anticipations may possibly find admittance,

sometimes, in "that hideous sight, a naked human heart." How it is possible for the soul of man to have a *fondness* for such a doctrine, (which is proved by a great *eagerness* in its defence) except by some such secret influences, is perfectly incomprehensible.

The grounds on which men can presume upon their own security from a future hell, without being restrained from sin, are various. They may either persuade themselves that they have been elected to inadmissible salvation from everlasting; or that they belong to so pure a church, that it is not to be supposed that any of its members will be finally cast off; or that God being the protector of orthodoxy, will never condemn any that are so sound in the faith as they are; or that, finally, their strict attendance upon gospel ordinances and church ceremonies will be a certain passport to future blessedness and salvation. In these several ways have men amused themselves with anticipations of endless felicity; and the favourite article of their creed, concerning the inconceivable misery of reprobates, has had little or no restraining influence upon their internal character, or upon their external actions.

It is fully admitted, however, that *the terror of the Lord* ought to be exhibited to mankind, in as strong colours as the Scriptures will justify; it is admitted also, that an exhibition of this righteous vengeance has often had the chief influence in awakening the slumbering souls of sinners; but the matter here contended for, is that after sinners are awakened, the character of the

Supreme Being must be carefully explained to them, or they will stop short of becoming his obedient children and voluntary servants. When they learn that the whole administration of their Maker is, and ever will be, regulated by the pure principles of holiness and goodness, they will understand, that nothing else than a persevering conformity to these principles can secure to them the blessing and complacency of such a Divine Ruler. But when men are constrained through simple fear, to flee from a kind of future punishment that is unaccountable, and not regulated by any known attribute of moral character, they will naturally embrace a plan of salvation that is equally unaccountable, and which elevates persons to heavenly happiness in some way that is separate from, or independent of, all intelligible rules and principles of a sentimental administration.

SECTION VIII.

Objections considered.

Obj. 1. "Let any man survey the death-bed of the wicked, and then doubt, if he can, the infinity of hell torments. If the horrors of Voltaire, Paine, Altamont, and others, were such on this side hell, that their presence was hardly to be endured by their friends, what must hell itself be?"

Ans. That hell is dreadful beyond expression, and especially to sinners who have spent a long life in diffusing the poison of sin through society, and sapping the moral foundation of nations, is an awful reality, proved by all kinds of evidence that can be brought to bear upon the subject. But it is an easy thing for the imagination to leap into conclusions that have nothing to do with the premises. Because Voltaire, whose malignity through a long life appeared to be directed immediately at the character, and life, and divinity of the Son of God, was filled with intolerable anguish on a dying bed, does it therefore follow that all sinners in a future state will, through all the faculties of soul and body, be filled with torment to the uttermost bounds of possibility? Does it therefore follow, that their misery will continue invariable or increasing, through an endless futurity? As to Voltaire himself, and Paine, and Judas, and any other reprobate that ever died in his sins, no man can know with certainty what will be the details of their eternal history. Suppose, after suffering tribulation and anguish through as many millions of ages as there are grains of sand on the sea shore, the soul of the most hardened atheist should be so subdued, that there might be some abatement of his misery without any injury to the moral universe, can any man prove that God has no *right*, or no *power*, or no *will*, to have any regard to the well-being of that creature? Thoughtless thousands will perhaps be ready to exclaim, if we suppose inconceivable anguish may be extended through as many

millions of ages as there are grains of sand upon the sea shore, we might as well extend it through eternity at once. But if we should multiply these millions of ages by the number of drops of water in the ocean, and multiply that sum by the number of leaves and blades of grass that have existed since the creation of the world, what would all this be, to a duration that can never end? We are only supposing, that through this amazing futurity something may be done to diminish the agony of the miserable damned, rather than to imagine they will suffer a perpetuity and an increase of horror while eternity endures. And, gracious heaven? has ecclesiastical power decided that a supposition of this kind cannot be entertained without dreadful heresy? What a singular transformation must scholastic theology produce in the sensibilities of the heart, that it should cause human creatures to struggle in defence of this tremendous doctrine, as a man would labour for the life of his first-born!

Obj. 2. "A secret ground of all these efforts to diminish the horror of hell torments, is the infidel disposition that refuses to believe in *mysteries*."

Ans. A refusal to believe mysteries is impossible. To believe in God, is a mystery; to believe there is no God, is a greater mystery still. Is the atheist therefore an orthodox divine, merely because he consents to believe mysteries? Certain men called Free-thinkers have imagined, or professed, that they have escaped from all mysteries, and that they now believe such things only

as they can clearly comprehend; but it is because they are almost *no-thinkers*, that they have arrived at such a stupid and false conclusion. Dr. Young, when speaking of God and his works, said with great propriety,

> "The more of wonderful
> Is heard of Him, the more we should assent.
> Could we conceive Him, God he could not be;
> Or He not God, or we could not be men.
> A God alone can comprehend a God;
> Man's distance how immense! On such a theme,
> Know this, Lorenzo! (seem it ne'er so strange)
> Nothing can satisfy, but what confounds;
> Nothing, but what astonishes, is true."

But let not the indubitable truth be overlooked, that the necessity we are under to believe mysteries, involves no necessity, and no obligation, to believe *contradictions*. To say bitter waters can flow from a sweet fountain, or that malevolent action can proceed from a Being of pure love, is not barely a mystery, but an absurdity, and an insult to God and the human understanding.

How long has the moral world been kept in darkness and perplexity, by having all manner of delusions and contradictions covered over with the veil of *mystery!* We have been required to believe, and to silence every hope of the contrary, that the God of love, by an absolute decree, reprobated from everlasting a large proportion of the human family, and decreed to fix them in eternal misery, *for his own glory!* We are required to believe at the same time, that though God decreed their

every action, yet he is not the author of sin; that the reprobates are to take the whole blame upon themselves, and to own that they deserve this punishment for being the subjects of the Almighty's divine and irresistible predestination; and that if any of them shall presume to doubt it, this will but serve to make their perdition the more dreadful, because of its being a *heresy*, and a refusal to believe *mysteries!*

Now what is the main ground-work of this gloomy and irrational system of doctrine? It is, that the Creator, from eternity, had no other sentiment towards reprobates, than a disposition to make them for ever miserable.

The doctrine under review is founded upon the same identical assumption, with this difference only, that it removes the scene to a *future* eternity. It supposes that God has not, and never will have, any regard to the well-being of those in hell; but on the contrary, has an immutable disposition to do nothing else than to perpetuate the full cup of their everlasting sorrow.

If the veil of *mystery* can justify this hypothesis, it will be found broad enough to cover the whole system of free wrath and eternal reprobation.

Obj. 3. "The idea of reforming the damned, and mitigating their pain, represents all future punishment as being nothing else than a universal *purgatory*."

Ans. The doctrine of purgatory, when taken in connexion with the design of its invention, truly deserves the abhorrence of all christendom; which is, that pol-

luted souls shall be cast into a certain fire in a future state, that by some chemical operation will gradually purify them, and fit them for the kingdom of heaven, into which they shall be received; after the removal of all corruption from their souls, by this purifying process. The duration of this punishment, it is said, may be shortened by the prayers of the clergy, provided the friends and relatives of the deceased will pay them money enough to compensate them for these prayers. Now the design of this invention evidently was, to enrich the clergy, and to establish and perpetuate ecclesiastical dominion. Their invention of a hell of absolute and boundless misery was a part of the same clerical policy. By this latter doctrine they hoped to frighten heathens and heretics into the bosom of the church, out of whose pale there is no salvation; by the former, they could control them after being brought into the church; and thus a fair prospect presented itself, of gradually subduing the whole world under their despotic sway, and securing for themselves a temporal dominion, affording every kind of gratification to the corrupt propensities of the human heart. Surely this was the master-piece, and the most potent engine that ever was devised by the profoundest policy of hell. All anticipations of future punishment were so shaped and moulded, as to build up an earthly kingdom, in which the love of *power*, of *ease*, of *wealth*, of *veneration*, and of *pleasure*, should be gratified to the full! Did those men really believe in the truth of man's

responsibility for eternity? No; a secret infidelity was evidently at the bottom of the whole contrivance.

The doctrine advanced in these pages has no resemblance whatever to this system. The views which are here exhibited, alike discard the *purgatory* and the *hell* which were so fondly diffused through the nations, during the dark ages of christendom. It is here contended, on the one hand, that punishment has no mechanical or chemical tendency to purify the soul; and on the other, that Divine penalties are never inflicted with the design to *rivet* sin in the soul, and to perpetuate its malignity.

That punishment is inflicted to *convince* the sinner of his criminality, and to *discourage* the continued perpetration of his crimes, is acknowledged to be the doctrine of these pages; but if this doctrine involve the notion of a purgatory, the objector will find himself driven into the same heresy; for he believes that in the present world God inflicts judgments on the wicked to *convince* them of the evil of their ways, and to *discourage* them in the practice of sin. According to the objection before us, when God said to Adam, "cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee," &c. he then and there established a universal *purgatory* over the earth, which he has maintained to the present hour. But if this kind of administration in the present world is not a purgatory, then the allegation is equally futile, when applied to a similar kind of process, in any period of future duration.

The objection assumes a worse doctrine than the one which it opposes: namely, that God will hereafter bind down all reprobates, and fix in their souls a fatal necessity of remaining full of sin, in order that they may remain full of misery; which representation of the matter is far more reproachful to heaven, and injurious to earth, than the popish doctrine of purgatory itself. Therefore if intelligent creatures were reduced to the unavoidable alternative of adopting one or the other of these opinions, all the dictates of their rationality and common sense would influence them to adopt the latter, in preference to the former. But they are under no necessity of choosing either; for the truth of God concerning a future state appears evidently to stand at an equal distance from both of those theological delusions.

Obj. 4. "Universal salvation is true, or it is not; if it is, honesty requires that it be openly advanced; if it is not, then eternal punishment ought to be proclaimed without any equivocation: To what purpose is all this laboured argument to conduct the reader to an indefinite conclusion—that we know not what God will do with the wicked in a future state? Is it not a singular way of distinguishing truth from falsehood, to tell the world that *we know not what the truth is?*"

Ans. God is really a good Being, or he is not; if he is, it ought to be consistently maintained; if he is not, honesty requires that we unequivocally announce it as an article of our creed, that *malevolence* will be his invariable principle of action towards the reprobated

part of his creation. Our arguments in the present treatise, conduct the reader to these definite conclusions—that "the Lord is good;" that "the Judge of all the earth will do right;"—that he will treat the wicked "according to their works;" that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" and that "Surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." (Job xxxiv. 12.) How much better is it to have these great truths *definitely* established, than to leave them all unsettled, and to sap the foundation on which they rest, for the sake of maintaining that God will perpetuate sin by his immutable decree, as the necessary ground of endless misery!

Our views are perfectly definite, in regard to our Creator's principles of action, and in regard to his unchangeable disposition to carry out those principles, without variableness or shadow of turning. It is much more desirable to have these essential truths permanently established, than it is to leave them on the floating waves of uncertainty, for the sake of assuming that we know the exact results of the Divine government on all the free agents that will exist through future duration.

If the agency of the wicked will be perpetuated for ever, we cannot certainly know what variations will take place in their character and condition, because we know not how they will ultimately exercise their responsible powers. The present objection would apply with all its force to God's treatment of nations in the present world: for although we know definitely that

God will treat them according to their works, yet what that treatment will be we know not, because we are necessarily ignorant of the manner in which they will conduct themselves. We are willing to confess that "we know not what the truth is," in regard to the actual results of the Almighty's administration in a future world. Our minds should cheerfully consent to be ignorant of these *secret things* which *belong to the Lord our God*, so long as we can rejoice in the brilliancy of the great truth revealed to us and to our children, that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* To abandon this glorious *Sun and Shield*, for the purpose of supporting the man-made orthodoxy of invariable punishment, is a sacrifice too great for any human soul to make, that can realize the immense importance of rightly *knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.*

Let opponents prove, if they are able, that condemned sinners are eternally destitute of all degrees of agency. If they cannot prove this, then it is evident, whatever they may pretend, that they "know not what the truth is" concerning this matter.

Agency appears evidently to be an essential constituent of a mental being; and if I mistake not, it can as soon be proved that the damned are deprived of all *intelligence*, as that they are destitute of every degree of *agency.*

We may justly require of the advocates of invariable or accumulating misery, to prove, if they are able,

that it is possible for a man or an angel to lose his *agency*, without at the same time losing his *intelligence*, and becoming absolutely insane. If they admit that the inhabitants of hell are still agents, we call upon them to prove, if they are able, that their agency is eternally *forced* into one invariable course of action. If they cannot prove this, how do they *know* what will be the precise course of action which will be pursued by the millions of fallen spirits in a future state? And if they do not know this, how can they be *certain* that they foresee the exact mode of treatment that all fallen creatures will receive from that Almighty Sovereign, whose indubitable right it is to reign? Is God bound to explain to us all the secrets of his empire, and to make known all that he knows himself concerning the arrangements of his government throughout all future ages? If not, why should presumptuous man be unwilling to own, that peradventure he "knows not what the truth is," in regard to many of the unexplored scenes of a boundless and infinite hereafter.

Obj. 5. "The spotless holiness of God, or, which is the same thing, his infinite hatred of sin, will influence him to punish sin to the uttermost; and human corruption is the sole ground of man's objections to this severity. Were we holy as God is holy, we should say amen to the whole force and energy of his sacred vengeance."

Ans. Holiness is the unmixed and unsullied perfection of all moral attributes. God is love; therefore love is

holiness; and God's hatred of sin is precisely his infinite abhorrence of all *malice* and *cruelty*. These constitute the essential character of sin; and God abhors them, because they are the opposite of every principle and sentiment of his own lovely and eternal Mind. His unchangeable hatred of these characteristics of sin, is itself the ground of an indubitable demonstration, that He will never imbibe them, or carry them into any part of his own course of judicial action.

Infinite hatred of sin implies that its *principle*, and its *results*, are equally and for ever abhorred. The essence of sin is *malice*, or a disposition *to produce and perpetuate misery, as an ultimate end.* Now if God abhors this principle, it is because of his aversion to its tendency and its results; that is, because of his infinite unwillingness that misery should be produced or perpetuated for its own sake, as an ultimate end of voluntary action. To say God's holiness causes him to hate this vile spirit, and yet that His holiness will influence him to perpetuate absolute misery as an ultimate end of his own action, is as direct a contradiction as human language can supply. The native and final result of sin is misery, and nothing else; the action of holiness is *opposite* to that of sin; therefore the tendency of the latter is to produce happiness; and it never inflicts punishment, but in order to counteract sin, and consequently to operate against ultimate and final misery. To say the action of sin, and that of holiness, both alike termi-

nate in simple and permanent misery, is to say they are essentially the same in their nature and tendency.

Why does God hate sin, but because of his aversion to the fruit of this bitter tree, which is misery and that only? His hatred of moral evil arises from his love to himself, and to his whole intelligent creation, against whose happiness it wages a malevolent and an eternal war.

A holy Being delights in holiness; and of course, is disposed to promote holiness as effectually and universally as it can be promoted: consequently, the Holy One of Israel never will do any thing to prevent the spread of holiness in any region of the universe, where moral agents are willing it should prevail. He will never do any thing to hinder any of his creatures from repenting of their sin, and becoming holy; for this is what the devil has been doing ever since sin entered into the world. To affirm that our Creator will pursue this course in a future state, is to suppose the most *holy* Being, and the most *unholy* one, will manifest themselves alike, both in purpose and in operation.

God's aversion to sin is not an infinite hatred of sinners; otherwise no sinner had ever been forgiven. To say he abhors their wicked character, and that he is at the same time unwilling for them to turn from their wickedness, is another gratuitous and manifest contradiction, on which the system of inexorable vengeance hangs.

Hence it is clear, that holiness in God's children does

not cause them to hate sinners, in any other sense, than having an abhorrence of their evil character. They love their persons, as fellow-creatures; and therefore they do all they can to prevail on them to forsake their sin, and to seek after holiness. Is not their Heavenly Father of the same disposition? Will he not ever remain the same? If a change shall take place in his mind hereafter, it will seem necessary that a change should also take place in the minds of his people; that in a future state they may hate sinners, and no longer have a desire that holiness should be extended through intelligent society. Has any man ever learned this kind of orthodoxy from the Bible? If any people imagine that true holiness causes them to love the doctrine of infinite sin and misery, as brought about by the judicial vengeance of the Almighty, they are very much mistaken; and they need a rebuke from Jesus, such as the disciples received, when they requested that they might have power to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans:—*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* A fondness for this system of wrath arises from a source very different from that of *holiness;* and it would be well for men, not only to inquire into the foundation of their opinions, but also to scrutinize the cause of their *attachment* to those views of future misery, which are so reproachful to God, and so revolting to the feelings of justice and humanity.

Obj. 6. "All modified and moderated views of future punishment arise from a denial of *total depravity:* they

suppose that sinners in hell can cure themselves, and can come out of the dreadful mire of iniquity; whereas their nature is so corrupt, even in this world, that they can do nothing towards their recovery, and can only be regenerated by a power equal to that which created the world: consequently, when God gives them up, as he will give up all reprobates in perdition, nothing will remain but for the deep disease of sin to abide in them, and to increase in violence for ever."

Ans. It is no matter of surprise that total depravity has long been a very favourite point of orthodoxy, for it is an essential link in the chain which supports the doctrine of eternal election and reprobation. I almost wonder that original corruption has not been called *infinite* depravity; for this is what the doctrine implies, as a necessary counterpart to infinite guilt, and infinite punishment.

Let us, however, inquire into the subject. If by the word *total*, we are to understand merely that all the faculties of the soul, without exception, have been defiled by the influence of sin, it may be safely admitted; but if we are called upon to believe that all the faculties are as full of corruption as they can hold, we cannot admit this, without renouncing the Bible, and embracing the whole system of Calvinian predestination.

God said to Moses on the Mount, "Get thee down, for thy people have corrupted themselves;" and Paul said to Timothy, "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse." Now if Adam's children are born totally

depraved,—that is, as full of corruption as they can hold,—it is impossible for them afterwards to "corrupt themselves," or to do any thing which will cause their evil nature to become "worse and worse:" for the doctrine is, that the depravity is so *total*, that it is impossible for it to increase, or otherwise, that of its own nature it will necessarily and unavoidably accumulate, as the child grows up to manhood. In neither case can men corrupt themselves, or wax worse and worse by their own voluntary actions; for they are supposed to be as corrupt already, as it is possible for them to be, independently of such actions.

The secret of the matter is this:—total depravity is fondly believed to be such as to *bind the will to evil of necessity*, so that men can never exercise an agency that will have any tendency to reformation, till they are regenerated by an irresistible act of Almighty power; after which act, their agency will be carried as uncontrollably in the way of goodness, as it was before carried in the way of evil. This is the precise meaning of *total depravity;* and Arminians have been frightened into it from the dread of *heresy;* and, by adhering to it, they have unwittingly drawn to their embrace the entire system of unconditional reprobation.

What are the facts, as we learn them from the instructions of our Creator? They are, that man is dependent on the Holy Spirit for all his success in ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well; and yet that the influences of the Holy Spirit may be either *complied*

with, or *resisted*, by man's voluntary agency. They are, that the Holy Spirit co-operates with *Providence*, with the *Gospel*, and with the *Law*,—all having a combined tendency to promote good, and to subdue evil, without taking any man out of a state of just and equitable responsibility. This is the plain doctrine of Scripture; and it is confirmed by universal experience.

From this doctrine, we may fairly draw these three conclusions: First, if *Providence*, the *Gospel*, and the *Law*, are used by the Supreme Being as means of promoting good, and subduing evil, the influences of the Holy Spirit are not intended to supersede these means, but to concur with them, in order to their efficiency on the unconstrained faculties and affections of the human soul.

Secondly, as *by the law is the knowledge of sin*, and as this law never operates in contradiction of itself, its *penalty* is intended to give the true *knowledge of sin*, and consequently to promote good, and to discourage evil, as well as its *precepts* and *prohibitions*.

Thirdly, as God gives efficiency to the means appointed by him to operate against evil, and furnishes an energy by his Holy Spirit to all who are willing to be benefited by those means, he has as much *power*, and as good a *right*, to give efficiency to them in any period of *future* duration, as he has in the *present*, or has had in the *past*. If it be said, that though he has the *right*, yet he *will* not do it in a future state, it is difficult to conceive why he will not, except it be either because it

would be a *dishonour* to himself, or an *injury* to his creation. Would it be an injury to heaven or earth, for the principle and the love of sin to be weakened in hell? or will any one say, that the endless and accumulating rage of moral evil, in a course of enmity against God, is really most honourable to God, and essential to the well-being of his upright universe?

The thought is sometimes entertained, perhaps, that God would *degrade* himself, by having any thing to do with the outcasts of hell; and that, like the ancient Scribes and Pharisees, he must refrain from having any intercourse with such sinners, *lest he should be defiled.* But can any man prove that God is any more degraded by the exercise of his grace and mercy, than he is by the exercise of his justice? Or shall we conclude that justice in hell is the operation of *another God?* or at least, that the one God carries on the process, by the exercise of his *other character?*

In short, this opinion, sometimes entertained by Arminians as well as others, that the inhabitants of hell are too vile to have any share in heaven's clemency, is the offspring of the system of doctrine referred to above. Reprobates are regarded as inconceivably *odious* beings, because God *hated* them from all eternity. The Almighty's regards, it is supposed, are to be exclusively confined to his *chosen.* The damned are infidels, heathens, and heretics; they are too contemptible for any favourable sentiment to be entertained for their well-

being, by their Creator, in any period of a progressive and an endless futurity!

They have, it is true, made themselves exceedingly vile by their wicked works; and the ground of it is, that these works proceeded from a hateful spirit of malice in their hearts, which they voluntarily cherished, and adhered to with obstinate perseverance; but if we say God is unwilling that their malevolent disposition should be subdued, our conclusion seems to be, that he loves to have a vast population of odious beings under his dominion, and therefore decrees that their evil character shall be for ever perpetuated.

Obj. 7. "The supposition that agency will be continued in all creatures in a future state, implies that the inhabitants of heaven are still free agents, and of course, that they may fall away and be lost."

Ans. 1. Suppose God should fix all the inhabitants of heaven in a state of holiness and happiness, by absolute power; does it therefore follow, that those in hell must be fixed in like manner in a state of sin and misery? If it does, the clear consequence is, that God is dependent on hell for his *ability* to sustain heaven; and that without having this basis to rest upon, his omnipotent arm must necessarily fail to perpetuate the happiness of his own children!

2. The inhabitants of heaven, as well as those of hell, will undoubtedly continue to be free agents. Why was all the apparatus of moral government, and such a long course of training resolved upon, but because the hap-

piness of creatures must be based upon a *moral* and not upon a *mechanical* foundation? If creatures can be fixed in a state of holy enjoyment by absolute power, they might have all been so fixed at their creation, and neither sin nor misery would have ever been known; and had such a plan been possible, and been the best, it is certain that infinite goodness would have adopted it.

3. It does not follow that because saints and angels in heaven are free agents, that any of them will fall away from their happy condition. They have the power of God for their protection; his wisdom for their guide; his justice for their defence; and his goodness for the supply of all their wants. They partake of the immutability of God, so far as this attribute can be possessed in the mind of a creature; and the whole course of their previous training was intended to produce a stability that should be voluntary, and without coercion.

4. The whole revelation of God, his whole course of Providence and moral government, from the beginning of the world to eternity, have a uniform tendency to encourage virtue and to discourage vice; and consequently, to *strengthen* the foundations of heaven, and in the same proportion to *weaken* the foundations of hell. To say that such a process is calculated to make hell as permanent as heaven, is as glaring a contradiction as can easily be conceived. No: the only ground on which the conclusion rests, that God will make sin and misery as permanent as holiness and happiness, is that he eternally operates with a *double character*:—

that he *loves* the inhabitants of heaven, and *hates* those of hell, simply as creatures; and consequently that he elected the former, and reprobated the latter, from everlasting. This is the only system which carries inexorable wrath along with it; and Arminians must embrace the whole system, or otherwise they must relinquish the indefensible doctrine of necessary sin and infinite misery for the wicked.

Obj. 8. "Our Saviour has given the most alarming account of future torment, of any prophet or apostle whose words are recorded in either the Old or the New Testament; He certainly knew the true state of the invisible world; therefore his authority is decisive, in regard to the tremendous nature and duration of future misery."

Ans. It is no less true, that the Lord Jesus Christ gave the most impressive and endearing account of the gracious and merciful disposition of the Eternal Father, of any person that ever appeared in our world. One part of his teaching has as much authority as another; and he never intended to contradict himself. He tells us that our Heavenly Father is merciful, and that a merciful disposition is that which He especially requires of all his children.

He informs us, moreover, that a negative and positive *cruelty* will be the chief ground of a sinner's condemnation in a future state. Their negative cruelty consists in an indifference to the miseries of the *hungry*, the *thirsty*, the *naked*, the *sick*, the *stranger* and the *prisoner*.

(See the 25th chapter of Matthew.) Their positive cruelty consists in *devouring widow's houses,* in *shutting the kingdom of heaven against men,* in *laying heavy burdens on men's shoulders,* and in *laying hands on a fellow servant, taking him by the throat,* and *casting him into prison,* because he was poor and miserable, and had nothing to pay. (See Mat. xxiii. 4, and verses 18, 27, &c.)

Now if we say the Lord Jesus presented before us the disposition of *cruelty,* as the chief cause of the Divine vengeance in a future state, and at the same time held forth God's judicial action as a process of *eternal cruelty,* do we not represent him as furnishing a statement of the case which will enable all intelligent beings to look up to the Creator and say, *Thou that judgest doest the same things?* And what greater *cruelty* can be conceived, than for creatures to be filled as full of torment as their capacity can hold, and be confined in necessary sin and misery without end, by Almighty power?

Alas!. this doctrine casts its shadow far behind, and eclipses all the sacred and soul-cheering truths of the Christian religion. In vain may we be told of the good providence of God towards Jews or Gentiles: in vain may we behold the mild and beautiful character of the Saviour, as "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person:" in vain may we study the justice, the veracity, and the kindness of our Maker's conduct in the present world:—the doctrine under review carries the universe forward to a gloomy

consummation, and causes all those stars of encouraging doctrine to set under an unfathomable cloud of mystery and darkness, which seems plainly undistinguishable from an unprincipled and an unfeeling despotism.

SECTION IX.

A condensed View of the operations of Moral Government.

The reader's attention is respectfully invited to the following arguments, in confirmation of what has been advanced:

1. Prior to the time when sin entered into the creation, God loved all his creatures, and delighted in their happiness. At that time he formed his plan of government, and so constructed it, that its action should promote the common welfare, without injustice and without partiality. This government was intended to be eternal; for being perfect, it could never be altered, without being altered for the worse. Its design was to discourage all wrong conduct, and to promote holiness and happiness in all created minds; and its *penalties*, no less than its *rewards*, were parts of one undivided system, having no contradiction in itself, intended to operate against evil, and to promote goodness, without restriction or limitation. Consequently, as its Author

changes not, and could not amend a perfect system, its tendency must ever remain the same. To suppose its penal operation will perpetuate sin and its consequences, in the minds of any beings in existence, is to assume, either that the government was originally partial, and, in regard to some creatures, aimed at the promotion of sin and misery, or that an essential change has since taken place in its constituent principles.

2. If the Divine government was originally fitted to operate in the promotion of sin and misery, in a part of the intelligent creation, it must have been because its Author intended that these evils should be produced; and of course, it was an essential part of the Divine plan, before intelligent creatures were brought into being, that a proportion of them should, in the final issue, be involved in endless pain; a conclusion this, which is founded upon the system of eternal reprobation, and which must stand or fall with that system.

3. On supposition that the Divine government was constituted to operate in favour of good, and in opposition to evil, and that too, *without variableness or shadow of turning*, it follows that the evil that is in hell is not and never will be *perpetuated by the action of this government.* The perpetuity of hell is caused by the agency of men and devils, and not by the agency of God, in any other way than as *he exercises a good agency in opposing evil;* consequently, if creatures would cease from the voluntary maintenance of evil, the government of God, as was originally intended,

would naturally operate in the production of universal happiness.

4. If the undivided purpose of God originally was to discourage all evil, and to promote all good, and if it be now, or will be hereafter, an essential part of his administration to perpetuate sin and misery, it follows that the introduction of moral evil has produced a change both in regard to the governing purposes of his mind, and to the tendency of his course of moral action. The ultimate result of this would seem to be, that the progress of evil will gradually absorb the action of goodness, and will draw it into itself as its coadjutor in the final perpetuation of misery.

5. If evil should be triumphant, against the original disposition of the Deity, and without making any change in his disposition, its uncontrollable accumulation, so far as I can see, would naturally tend to produce grief and lamentation in all upright minds, and even in the mind of the Almighty himself. It would seem calculated to fill all heaven with despair, under the dismal apprehension that there is an energy in moral evil that will finally eventuate in the destruction of all happiness.

6. The basis on which we avoid such a melancholy conclusion, is precisely the following: Goodness has Almighty power in its possession; it has an unchangeable disposition to use this power in a manner best calculated to subdue evil, and to establish the contrary; it has infinitely stronger *motives* to present to created minds, and thereby to influence created agency, than

evil possibly can have; therefore goodness will eternally have the ascendency, and its native consequences will continually enlarge, while sin and misery will be diminished, or be kept in a state of just and invariable subordination. Moral evil, though it may continue to rage and fight against God, can never come off victorious.

7. If any creatures in a future state will have lost all agency, it must be because the Almighty could not prevent it; for if his government has been operating in the best manner possible to promote good and to prevent evil, and if creatures, notwithstanding its operation, have sustained so great an evil as the loss of their agency, which is the most distinguished faculty of their created nature, no other conclusion remains, than that this calamity has ensued in defiance of the whole energy and influence of the Divine government. Sin has triumphed over the essential constitution of mind, and has nullified the original energy of creation! The only way in which this conclusion can be set aside, is by saying that agency was not really made free, but was so formed at first as necessarily to choose in one direction; and of course, that it was an essential part of the Creator's plan, that the reprobated part of his creatures should choose wrong, and sink into eternal misery.

Hence the conclusion seems indisputable, that no creature will ever be confined in a state of necessary evil, by any penal operation of the Divine government, unless it can be proved that said government was ori-

ginally formed with a view to this very end. If this can be proved, the entire system of predestination must be adopted; and the most ultra Calvinists are the only people upon earth who hold to a consistent scheme of theology.

8. While Arminians will be apt to feel reluctant to embrace the predestinarian system, on account of its sustaining the favourite doctrine of infinite misery for the wicked, Calvinists themselves, upon reflection, will find no real cause to rejoice in the conclusion to which their creed is calculated to conduct the inquiring mind. When they look away from their own supposed individual security, to the melancholy destiny of a large proportion of their fellow creatures, a painful sympathy must sometimes disturb their tranquillity. Multiplied millions of their brethren of the human race are coming on the stage of life, whose unavoidable fatality it is, to spend a few years of restless vanity in this world, as a prelude to unutterable anguish that is destined to be without intermission and without end! When from this sad contemplation they raise their thoughts to the Great Supreme, all is mystery the most profound and impenetrable. Their *confidence* in him will sometimes waver, whence will be produced a chilling influence upon their *love;* and this cannot fail to convey *discomfort* to the consciousness of the soul.

9. When they do enjoy comfort of mind, in the supposed security which the system affords themselves, it will be interrupted by the conviction which will force

itself upon them, that theirs is, and necessarily must be, a perfectly *selfish* enjoyment. The system which is supposed to make their own eternal happiness secure and certain, makes the eternal misery of a vast proportion of mankind equally so; and it is by no means improbable that a majority of their own children are on the dark list of inevitable reprobation. The same principle of government, or rather the same original decree which is destitute of all principle, while it secures their personal felicity, binds their own children in the fatal bond of never-ending misery. What *father*, possessing even "natural affection," can take pleasure in a plan of partial grace involving consequences so tremendous?

10. The system will peradventure be found, moreover, to leave their own happiness more insecure than might at first view be imagined. In the first place, they are probably not quite certain that they themselves are of the elect number; and if there should be any doubt of this, what an amount of horror must be in such an uncertainty! And even supposing their own election should be thought certain, a fair examination of the matter will leave it problematical whether the eternal happiness of the elect themselves is perfectly secure under such a mysterious government. The decree of election is supposed to originate in God's eternal love for their *persons*. Now a preference which is unaccountable, and founded on no reason, is merely *capricious;* for what is *caprice*, but an affection, or purpose of mind, which is founded upon no reason, and

is regulated by no principle? Such an affection, in the nature of things, must be fluctuating; because there is no principle to make it permanent. If we say the everlasting love for the elect existed in the Divine Mind of *necessity*, and hence his course of action towards them necessarily proceeded, we find ourselves at once landed on the ground of atheistic fatality; but if the Supreme Being chose to love them by the free exercise of his own will, he had sufficient reasons for this affection, founded on good principle, or otherwise he chose to exercise *caprice* and *partiality*. The elect, as creatures, were precisely the same as reprobates; and as fallen creatures, their corruption was the same. Our Calvinist brethren often tell us that the elect resist God as long as they can; and it is evident that reprobates do no more; therefore it must puzzle a theologian as well as a philosopher, to determine why the former should be preferred to the latter.

The great Ruler of the world maintains his unchangeable stand upon moral principle: on this ground he demands of his creatures to meet him, that he may have sufficient reasons to love, and reward them: if they refuse to do so, he then has sufficient reasons to disapprobate and punish them. But to say his approbation and disapprobation are originally formed without any reason whatever, independently of all regard to a just responsibility, and that his rewards and punishments are dispensed accordingly, is to sap the foundation of his

moral government, and to eclipse the whole glory of his Divine character.

It is pretended that we must embrace all these absurdities, as the only possible way of avoiding the heretical doctrine of human *merit;* but it is presumed there is some way of escape from this heresy, without running into the great deep of unconditional reprobation.

No possible doings of man can merit the reward of eternal happiness; and yet men's actions can be such as to furnish a sufficient reason, on the ground of a righteous impartiality, for one creature to be rewarded, and another punished; otherwise it is indubitable that man is not responsible at all, and that the inhabitants of hell are exactly as free from DEMERIT, as those of heaven are destitute of merit. Thus to avoid one imaginary heresy, we are invited into a wilderness of absurdities, where neither sun nor stars appear, but where all is confusion and disorder, and "darkness that may be felt."

11. The only way to avoid this course of error and contradiction, is consistently to maintain that the whole government of the Deity is regulated by an unwavering purpose, *to maintain and promote holiness, so far as created beings will consent for it to be promoted, and to make all creatures happy who are willing to be made so upon this foundation.* Arminians must admit this axiom, or otherwise they will necessarily exchange the system of doctrine advocated by Wesley and Fletcher, for that which was established at the Synod of Dort. And if

they admit the position above stated, they will find themselves conducted to one or the other of these two conclusions: either that our Creator will maintain the same moral process through all future duration, as specified in the axiom, or that an essential change will have taken place in his disposition and measures; and that in a future state he will establish his government upon the precise ground which Calvinists say he resolved upon from all eternity.

12. The method whereby our Calvinist friends attempt to evade the consequences which we fasten upon their scheme of doctrine, is as singular as it is indefensible. They say, reprobates sin freely; that they choose the way of death without coercion; and therefore they justly deserve the damnation that was appointed for them from everlasting. Mr. Calvin informs us that "Freedom from *necessity* is naturally inherent in man, so that nothing can deprive him of it." This maxim is held, at the same time, in connection with the following from Augustine, in which Calvinists, ancient and modern, agree: "The will being changed for the worse, I know not by what corrupt and surprising means, is itself the author of the *necessity* to which it is subject." (See "Difficulties of Arminian Methodism," pages 314 and 324.) Augustine adds, "If we are bound by our own passions, which are under the government of sin, so that we are *not at liberty* to obey our Father, there is no reason why we should plead this *necessity*

in our defence, the criminality of which is within ourselves, and must be imputed to us." (Ibid.)

These quotations affirm that man has "freedom from *necessity*" and yet that he "is *not at liberty*," but that, by some surprising means, he is "*subject to necessity*," his own will being the author of this subjection. Are not these palpable contradictions? Nothing can save them from this charge, but giving different meanings to the word *necessity*, in the several sentences. I know of two kinds of necessity only: *physical* and *moral*. The former is a man's being bound to act as he does, because he *cannot* do otherwise; the latter, his being bound to act as he does, because he *ought* not to do otherwise. As to a figurative or accommodated sense of the word necessity, it has nothing to do with the present question. The whole controversy turns upon physical or positive necessity. Our Calvinist brethren appear to believe in another kind, which for distinction's sake may be called metaphysical necessity. This consists in some "corrupt and surprising means," whereby the will *binds itself*, so that "it is not at liberty," but renders us subject to a "necessity within ourselves, that must be imputed to us." The man is still free to *act*, it seems, but has no power to *choose* differently from what he does. But if a man has no power to *choose*, he has no power to *act* in pursuance of that choice; otherwise we say he can act without *intending* to act, which is impossible. If he has no power to *choose*, he

has no power over the *action* which depends upon that choice.

It is assumed, we perceive, that when man chooses in a wrong direction, it is because he is "*not at liberty*," or has no power to choose otherwise, which is nothing more nor less than simply begging the question. It is taking for granted, that when a man chooses to do wrong, it is because he cannot change the purpose of his mind, by reason of some "corrupt and surprising means" in his own will; and hence we are conducted to the conclusion which is first assumed in the premises, and are furnished with a striking example of what logicians call *reasoning in a circle.* This favourite maxim, that the will is *free*, and *not free*, at the same time, is the great centre point of predestination. On this contradiction the whole system hangs. Consciousness testifies, however, that we have power to *reverse* our choice, or to alter the purpose of our will; the Bible confirms this testimony, by abounding with commands, promises, threatenings, and expostulations; therefore consciousness and the Bible jointly prove that the doctrine of predestinarian fatality is founded upon the sand.

If the sinner is "not at liberty," and cannot *choose* to alter his course, his physical power of *action* alters not the case; for the necessity which he is under is as absolute as if he were bound in fetters of iron. It is said, indeed, that the corrupt will "is itself the *author* of the necessity to which it is subject." The position must not be forgotten, however, that it is in consequence of

"the will being changed for the worse," that it becomes involved in this metaphysical necessity. Now if the will was "changed for the worse" by the man himself, it must be admitted that he was the "author" of the change; but the whole theory supposes that prior to the will being altered for the worse, it was under the same necessity of choosing good, as it is since under of choosing evil, and had no power to make any change in the course of its volition. A revolution must therefore have been produced by another cause, whereby the creature was corrupted, and rendered "not at liberty to obey our father." Who was the "author" of this melancholy departure into the fatality of sin? If we say the Deity, must not he himself have been first changed from good to evil? If so, who was the "author" of this change in him? Alas! for the excuses and apologies of predestination!

In regard to the doctrine in which Calvinists and Arminians appear to agree, that the perpetuity of sin is settled in all the inhabitants of hell, by an uncontrollable and unchangeable fatality, we may observe first, that as there is no proof of this fact from the Bible, nor from reason, nature or philosophy, it is as gratuitous an *assumption*, as that which fixes the fatal decree of sin in a past eternity. Secondly, if those sinners have destroyed their agency by their own action, when was it done? There is reason to believe that many have died in their sins at fifteen years of age, while others have repented and been converted at the age of three score.

How happens it that the agency of some sinners is so much more easily destroyed for ever, than that of others? Thirdly, the Rev. Richard Watson, as we have lately seen, would not admit the supposition that mere punishment will convert the soul in a future state; and what better reason have we, I ask, to suppose that mere punishment will perpetuate sin in a future state? Fourthly, Mr. Watson said also, "that an amount of *influence* on the mind, which would compel a definite choice," on the side of virtue, "is not to be assumed in regard to any future trial." Neither is it to be assumed, on the other hand, that any amount of *influence* will "compel a definite choice," on the side of vice and continued rebellion. Such an assumption, to say the least, would certainly be as groundless as the other.

In short, the doctrine which fixes this fatal decree in a *past* eternity, and that which fixes it in a *future* eternity, agree to impute a reprobating disposition to our Creator; and they alike represent him as keeping in existence involuntary beings, or beings destitute of all agency, for no other purpose than to fill their consciousness with invariable and endless misery! That men possessing the feelings of humanity should be prevailed on to believe such a doctrine, is wonderful; but that any of them should *rejoice* in it,—as they evidently did when heretics were burnt at the stake,—this indeed is more wonderful still; and it seems but too well calculated to make a considerate person feel ashamed that he is a man.

SECTION X.

Importance of a true Knowledge of God, in its Influence on future Generations.

The character of Almighty God must be exhibited in all its fullness and glory, and be maintained in its consistency, before the millennium can be introduced. A just and clear representation of Christian theology will open the way for the introduction of that long anticipated and delightful period, in the several ways following.

First, it will harmonize the views and feelings of ministers of the gospel, and terminate the bitterness of sectarian controversy. There may still be discussion, for mutual aid and advancement in knowledge; but while men harmonize in judgment concerning *the excellency of our God*, their difference of opinion in other matters will be of inconsiderable importance. The great and protracted controversies of christendom have been excited by certain doctrines which resulted from false views of the Divine Being, and which never can be kept in countenance, where the sunbeams of His moral glory are shining without a cloud. Let us agree that there is *one God*, essentially of *one character*, and it will be easy for us to become *one body of Christ*. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also *may be one in us;* that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John xvii. 3—21.)

Secondly, it will unite Christians in one supreme object of contemplation, and in a mutual conviction, that there is really but one road to the kingdom of heaven. Let men embrace the truth without contradiction, and without wavering, that God is indeed an uncompounded fountain of all moral perfection, and how immensely interesting will they find it, to improve their knowledge of this great subject, and to understand the consistent energy of the Divine Mind, in regulating the destinies, and promoting the welfare, of the whole intellectual creation! They will clearly understand that such a Being is truly *the God of peace*, and *the God of all comfort;* and that jars and conflicts among his creatures, must ever incur his sovereign disapprobation. The conviction will be irresistible, that as God is holy, without any mixture or deficiency, he must love holiness in others, and abhor the contrary; and consequently, to become like God, or to be *partakers of the Divine nature*, is the one and the only way to the kingdom of heaven. When the opinion is practically entertained, that God will be pleased with us for despising or persecuting others, this arises from our mentally imputing false principles and sentiments of mind to him; and so also does the persuasion which has been so common, that we can secure his favour by a mere attention to external forms and ceremonies. This supposes him

to be a formal and ceremonious Deity; or that there is some kind of *mystery* in the disposition of his mind, which is pleased with something *else* than the essential characteristics of moral goodness. But let these delusions be removed from the minds of men, as they will be by the brightness of the Almighty's glory, and Christians will be drawn together,—will be *perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment*,—and the Millennium will soon open to the view of a delighted universe.

Thirdly, the public attention will be called to the consideration of religious truth, in a manner that has not been witnessed for the last fifteen hundred years. Inconsideration in mankind is a very great crime; and it is sacredly obligatory on religious teachers to avoid whatsoever would promote, or seem to excuse, this destructive evil. The people have long had such doctrines exhibited before them, from the pulpit and the press, concerning God and his dispensations, as have produced in them a habit of viewing the whole subject of divinity as a *mystery*, which they cannot understand, and which they need not approach. Hence they feel excused in dismissing the whole theme from their attention, and in devoting their mental faculties to other subjects of inquiry or amusement. The land is flooded with *novels*, and the public taste is deplorably vitiated; one cause of which probably is, that Theology is presented in a form that is repulsive, or is not maintained in that consistency which challenges the assent of the

human judgment, or with that attractiveness which is calculated to engage the attention of a contemplative mind. The views too often given, naturally tend to promote general ignorance; because, from the kinds of doctrine authoritatively exhibited, the people receive the impression, and become habitually settled in it, that there is nothing in theology that is really worth learning. A gloomy sovereignty is held up to their view, apparently altogether capricious in its selections, and inexorable in its purposes, to fill a future eternity, in reference to a vast majority of the world, with invariable and interminable agony. The sinner says in his heart, it is mystery all, with nothing in it calculated to engage the attention of the mind; it may be true, or it may not, and I do not intend to give myself much trouble to ascertain whether it be or not. This conduct, indeed, may all be resolved into the enmity of the carnal mind against God; but let the character of God be fairly represented, and this enmity will be left without excuse; whereas if religious teachers misrepresent God, and thereby cause him to be reproached and distrusted, their false doctrines are in a great measure the cause of the injury and the insult. Men live without God in the world, not simply because their carnal mind is enmity against him, but because they have been bewildered and misled by false views of his dispensations.

Fourthly, a consistent and correct knowledge of the Deity will be a prelude to the Millennium, by removing

infidelity out of the way.—*That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

Deists ought to be rebuked for their unfair and uncandid hostility to the Christian religion; but while we blame them, let us be ingenuous enough to own, that stumbling blocks have been cast in their way, by the distorted views which have too often been given of religion. After all the complaints which we have heard, concerning the various orders of heretics, it is presumed that the whole of them together have not had half the influence in diffusing infidelity through the world, as has been produced by the old and orthodox church that has travelled down to us through the dark ages; and many of the Protestant leaders also, from the Synod of Dort until the present hour, have been teaching doctrines as well calculated to fill the world with deists, as any of those which have been promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church, or by any order of heretics that ever existed.

Fifthly, a just view of the Divine character will set before us an open door of Christian liberality, and thus will facilitate the progress of truth through the earth. We shall learn that as God has no tyranny in his nature, so he is always displeased with us when we exercise despotic authority over our fellow-men. The better his character is understood, the brighter it will shine; and of course, there will be no necessity to bind the human soul in ecclesiastical fetters, for fear it should know and understand the truth too well. Why do ecclesiastical

bodies ordain that men *shall* believe this, and *shall not* believe the other, but because they suspect their systems cannot sustain themselves by evidence, and therefore must be sustained by mere authority? They aver, that these creeds are indispensable, because it is needful to *tie* the minds of men down to the truth; not considering that the same clerical process will also *tie* the human mind to systems of error, as effectually as it can bind them to the truth, by its authoritative energy. Indeed, it is error only, that requires these ecclesiastical contrivances. Truth wants them not; and as little does she need the arts of the sectarian, to suppress inquiry, and to keep the light of evidence from being brought before the public mind.

To "Arminian Methodists" I appeal; and I beseech them by all the principles of candour and consistency, to consider well, whether they can avoid the entire system of original and absolute decrees, on any other ground than that which is occupied in the preceding pages. Will they hold fast to this whole system, for the sake of some long-cherished tenet, such as that of infant guilt, or the uniformity of hell torments, with which the Calvinistic system is inseparably connected? Let all christendom hope for better things!

Error alone can receive support by enjoining it on the human mind to think only as it shall be directed by ecclesiastical authority. Truth delights in the freedom and sunshine of open day. She needs no darkness to conceal her, and no sectarian management to keep her

evidences from being brought before the public attention. Such arts are needed only by that which cannot bear to be seen in a clear light.

The clergy of the several denominations are supposed to be the guardians of the people's faith. They are set upon the walls of Zion to watch and see when and where heresy is approaching, and to give the note of alarm.* The Church of Rome makes no secret of the

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* The author published a book in 1813, entitled "An Essay on the Plan of Salvation." Not long after its publication, a Remonstrance against some of its doctrines was sent to the General Conference in Baltimore, of which the author was a member, by a Local Minister of the same community, whose name was Mark Moore. The Remonstrance was printed, and several copies distributed, I believe, some time before the meeting of the General Conference; but shortly after the opening of the session, it was formally laid before that body, that they might interpose their authority in the premises. Whether this document can now be had, is not known with certainty. Two statements contained in it, however, are distinctly recollected. The brother who presented the Remonstrance, after pointing out the heresies of the Essay, told the members of the General Conference emphatically, that they were "*The guardians of our faith;*" and that if the doctrines of this book should be admitted, we should have none other than "*a finite standard, with which to measure the turpitude of transgression.*" An infinite standard was wanted, it seems, with which to measure various degrees of criminality, as though there could be *degrees* in infinity! The General Conference referred the subject to the Baltimore Annual Conference, to which body the author was responsible. A committee was appointed in due form, and the matter thoroughly examined; but we have not learned that any

matter, but claims the right to control all faith by authority, as a prerogative granted to her from high heaven; and the faithful are duly notified by the published sanction of a bishop, or by some other indication of clerical decision, what books they are allowed to read. Other denominations manage the business more secretly. They whisper the matter significantly through the ranks, and give their flocks to understand that Mr. —— is a dangerous man, and that such and such books are heretical publications. The people understand the meaning of the hint, however indirectly given; and like the terrified brood when it hears the note of alarm from the mother's voice, they run under the wings of ecclesiastical authority for protection.

Now for my part, I find myself unable to avoid these following conclusions: first, that whatever Protestant denomination is most expert in these sectarian arts, is the one which most resembles the Roman Catholic Church. Secondly, if these practices are innocent and virtuous in one denomination, they are equally so in another; and of course, Unitarians, Universalists, Deists, and even Atheists, have as good a right to prevent the spread of truth through society by this course of management, as other people have. Thirdly, such a practice is as fully calculated to promote error, as to main-

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heresy was ever detected, and I continue unto this day, witnessing to small and great, and saying none other thing than that which the prophets and apostles did say was true; namely, that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

tain "the truth upon the earth;" and therefore it rests upon the assumption, that truth and error are supported in the same way, and depend upon the same means for their defence; whereas it is undeniable that truth loves the light, and error loves darkness; truth seeks to be known openly, and error wants concealment; truth flourishes in the sunshine of unobstructed evidence, and error requires that reason and revelation be suppressed by authority, or be kept out of sight by sectarian policy and intrigue.

The author of the present publication, it may be said, is very desirous to have a hearing from all parties. This is the exact truth of the matter; and he avows it openly without a blush. If Catholics and Predestinarians shall resort to the above-mentioned course of management, to keep the present discussion from being read and examined, it will be no matter of surprise; but should "Arminian Methodists" do so, from a suspicion that the author has not duly used a sectarian square and compass, to make every sentence and every sentiment correspond precisely with Old Methodism, he will regret it seriously, and peradventure will pray that "the counsel of Ahithophel may be turned into foolishness."

If the reader will pardon this digression, we will return to the advantages of a correct knowledge of the Divine character, in its influence upon future generations.

Sixthly, this knowledge will inspire the minds of men, and fill them with the unobstructed glow of religious

devotion, by clearly evincing that the nature of God has every thing in it that is calculated to attract the religious feelings of the human soul. The mind will not be embarrassed with contradictions, nor enveloped in any dark mysteries to render it doubtful whether good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, love and hatred, be of the same nature, and precisely similar in their final operations.

Seventhly, it will endear the Lord Jesus Christ to the believing soul, by exhibiting the consistent benevolence of the whole of his mediatorial labours and purposes. It will be seen that he came, not to appease inexorable vengeance, and to buy souls away from their dependence upon heaven's forgiving clemency; but to magnify the law and make it honourable; to glorify the Father's name; to declare his righteousness; and to demonstrate that Christ himself, as man's Redeemer, was *the gift of the Father's love to the world.* (John iii. 16.)

Eighthly, this true knowledge of God will refute and ultimately eradicate infidelity, by showing that it is utterly without excuse. Its arguments against the Christian religion, which are only applicable to a false theology, will sink and disappear; and Deists will be compelled to own, that the God who is revealed to mankind in the Bible, possesses a character so reasonable, so just, and so benevolent, that it must appear to the common intelligence of the world to be worthy of all acceptation; and no man, but an enemy to his species,

can entertain a wish that it might be false. The more clearly this Sun of righteousness shall shine, and disperse the clouds of theological delusion, the more will infidelity be confused, and the more speedily will it be compelled to hide its head for shame, and to give up the contest.

Ninthly, it will expose all kinds of *tyranny* amongst mankind, by showing that tyranny is the root, and centre, and quintessence, of all forms of sin; and that every attribute of God stands as unchangeably opposed to it, as light is opposed to darkness, and happiness to misery. It will be clearly perceived in this sunshine, that every species of malignity is a trait of the Devil's character; and that the very reason why sinners are damned, is that the malevolence of sin is utterly unfit for the benignant harmony of heaven.

Tenthly, this encouraging view of the Supreme Being will enable and stimulate all Christians to "hold fast the *confidence*, and the *rejoicing of the hope*, firm unto the end." (Heb. iii. 6.) All will be brought to understand the truth of the matter, that the souls of men are to be purified and saved by *confidence* and *hope*, and not by *terror* and *despair*. What more does the apostle say to the Hebrews? "For we are made partakers of Christ; if we hold the beginning of our *confidence* steadfast unto the end." (Heb. iii. 14.) This does not mean that we are to hold fast the beginning of our despondency and *fear of hell* firm unto the end. Again: "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to

the full assurance of hope unto the end." (Heb. vi. 11.) Once more: "Cast not away therefore your *confidence*, which hath great recompense of reward." (Heb. x. 35.) Hence we see, that men are purified and fitted for the great recompense of reward, by "*confidence*," by "the *rejoicing* of the *hope*," and by "the *full assurance of hope*." This differs very materially from the supposition, that the great sanctifying and saving instrumentality, is to be nothing else than *the fear of infinite punishment.*

Lastly, this subject will prepare the way for the world's conversion, and will, with a mild but a mighty energy, melt down the hearts of men into the gospel mould. For "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." If eternal life comes by knowing God, it certainly must be by knowing him in his true character, and not by viewing him as a double-minded being, or as taking pleasure in the endless misery of any portion of his intelligent creation. Mankind will be brought to understand, that all sin consists in diversified modes of carrying into operation an odious malignity, which has long been excused by a false theology, but which in reality is utterly inexcusable. They will learn that sin is an irrational and detestable enmity against perfect loveliness and righteousness; that its essential nature is to produce misery, both in ourselves and others; that this misery will increase, as sin increases; and that all the interests of heaven, and the

glory of eternal goodness, will require that every incorrigible sinner shall have a damnation proportioned to the vileness of his hostility against God, and against all intelligent society. Thus learning that sin carries an awful hell in its own bosom, and that the sinner must feel another awful hell by that just operation of the Divine government which is necessary to prevent the poison from spreading through the universe, thoughtful millions will flee from sin, as being the very devil, and the very hell, that ought to be eternally dreaded and abhorred; and they will return to the Paternal Bosom of unchanging Benevolence, as *the strong Tower, into which they may continually resort.* Thus will they experimentally realize the deep meaning of our Saviour's sublime and finishing prayer, which we have twice quoted, and which ought to be repeated and remembered every day, and if possible, every hour of our lives,—"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John xvii. 3.)

CONCLUSION.

THE reader will observe, that in the foregoing pages no *hypothesis* is formed, in regard to any precise results of the Divine administration through the great deep of a coming eternity. The prominent axioms of the Bible, in accordance with all the analogies of nature, have conducted us to the delightful conclusion, that a Being presides over the destinies of the universe, whose SUFFICIENCY, CHARACTER, and DESIGNS, are the most glorious and lovely that it is possible for created or uncreated intelligence to conceive. Men and angels have cause for eternal exultation that the Almighty lives, and can *lift up his hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever.* (Deut. xxxii. 40.) All who know and love the truth, will rejoice in the *existence*, the *happiness*, the *sincerity*, the *justice*, the *authority*, the *wisdom*, the *power*, the *goodness*, the *impartiality*, and the *immutability* of God.

From such a character the indubitable inference is, that all the punishments judicially inflicted by Him, will be the energy of *Love* opposing *Malice*—that is, essential goodness rightfully repelling the malignant efforts of essential evil. The design and tendency of all the Divine penalties are, to *prevent* evil, to *hold it in check*, to *drive it back*, to *weaken*, *diminish* and *destroy* it. This must be admitted by all who are willing to admit, that the actions of God are diametrically *opposite* to those

of the devil. The devices of the latter are invariably intended to *promote* evil, to *remove checks out of its way*, to *strengthen*, *enlarge*, and *perpetuate* it. For this very reason God opposes the devil, and calls upon all his children to resist him steadfast in the faith; and "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil;" consequently their actions never co-operate; seeing the one is invariably aiming to build up what the other is using his efforts to destroy.

Hence it is evident, that an intelligent course of action, on the part of a Being who is opposite in *character* to the devil, must be opposite in *design* and *tendency*. Yet in all this mighty conflict of good and evil, no mechanical force is applied to the agency of any individual. How long the devil and his angels will persist in their malicious war against heaven, or how many of the abandoned children of Adam they will have in their train, we know not and presume not to conjecture. A sinner who says in his heart, that he will never forsake his sins so long as he is allowed to anticipate any thing less than infinite misery, might as well say in plain language, that he must have a tyrant to govern him, because he is not, and will not be, any thing else than an abject slave. A tyrant is already the ruler of his soul; for as the disposition of the devil is to promote evil, to remove checks out of its way, to push it forward, to strengthen, enlarge, and perpetuate it, his obvious pur-

pose appears to be to keep his slaves in sin and in all its consequences without end and without diminution.

A man who says in his heart, that nothing else than such an anticipation of the future shall restrain him from sin, says plainly that the government of God is a burden so intolerable, that subjection to it is a calamity than which nothing can be a greater, except only a torment that will fill the uttermost capacity of the soul for ever and ever! And suppose a man of this sentiment should be frightened to repentance by the fear of such a hell, would he be a fit companion for angels? Alas! for religious teachers to make this dreadful picture a substitute for the character of God, as the means whereby to reform mankind, would be like an attempt to blow out the Sun, in order to enlighten the world by the fires of a volcano.

It is supposed that all other motives, except this fiery one, will be utterly inefficient; and that if we present to mankind any thing short of a torment the most absolute that can be conceived, we shall sap the foundation of all the morals of society. But it would be no difficult matter to evince that the morals produced by the sole influence of this motive would be a kind of service that God will not accept of any man. For every act of service from this consideration, would be an impeachment of all God's essential attributes. Every effort at repentance and reformation would carry this language in its bosom:—the dread of an absolute despotism is the only thing that influences me to give up my sins;

and if I had any other way to escape absolute misery, there is nothing in God, or in his government and kingdom, for the sake of which I would devote myself to his service. It is easy to see that in this reformation there would be no principle, and no vestige of true repentance; for it would imply no conviction of criminality, but merely that the individual has the misfortune to be under the power of a Being whose vengeance cannot be resisted.

It is true, as Dr. Young says, "They that will not *fear* shall *feel* the wrath of heaven." But this wrath, as we have before explained, is a holy and just course of action against the raging energy of moral evil; and a sinner who deprecates this wrath reveres the righteousness and loveliness of the character from which it proceeds; and his dread of losing the favour of such a Ruler is an essential ingredient in all his religious fears.

Good men are quickly alarmed, lest the motives to restrain vice should be weakened; and they seem readily to take for granted, that the strongest view of future misery that can be conceived, is necessary to the reformation of the world; but if this be true, we must of course exhibit the uttermost that it would be possible for Almighty malevolence to inflict. Now will good men undertake to sustain the position, that God will really inflict this amount of punishment? If so, they must plainly teach, that there is no difference between the conduct of our Creator, and that of an Infinite Tyrant; and where there is no difference in *conduct*, there

is obviously no difference in *character*. Hence the conclusion would be, that there is no way effectually to discourage sin, but to maintain that our Creator is essentially an evil and malicious Being. This cannot be true; therefore such views of futurity as are perfectly consistent with the rectitude and benevolence of God, and those alone, will be really salutary in their tendency.

Abraham informed the rich man in hell, that if his five brethren would not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one should arise from the dead. Now if the strongest possible view of this matter be necessary to reform the world, the rich man was right, in supposing that one should go from the dead to give the most impressive representation that could be given.

But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. Now what did Moses and the prophets teach? Did they teach that sin is an infinite evil, and therefore will be punished with an infinite punishment? Where is it written? They merely taught that God is a holy and just and good Being, who will forgive sinners if they repent, and who, if they repent not, will punish them according to the turpitude and malignity of their evil deeds.

It will puzzle any man to find where Moses and the prophets ever taught the doctrine of infinite misery for the wicked; and yet Abraham informs us, that if there be not force enough in the writings of Moses and the

prophets, a messenger from the dead would avail nothing.

No stronger proof could be given, that it is not simple *fear*, but a correct view of the Divine glory which Moses and the prophets gave, that will bring sinners to repentance; and the view which they presented was that God's government and character, are perfectly consistent with eternal goodness and righteousness.

A sinner who says in his heart that no other consideration than that above mentioned shall ever restrain him from sin, resolves to hold fast the very disposition which will make it necessary for his punishment to be eternal; for God will never accept of any service offered from this slavish motive; and if the sinner persist to eternity in refusing to be influenced by any other, it will of course be necessary for him to be punished for ever. This motive, therefore, which is thought to be so exclusively efficient in reforming mankind, manifestly tends to *prevent* their reformation.

No man who believes the Bible, will deny that *the love of God* is essential to Christian holiness; and we are bound to love him in his true character, and not to impute false attributes to him; for this would be to *love that which is not God.* Now if we love him for punishing his creatures, it must be from a conviction of the truth, that he does so from a lovely principle: namely, to promote and defend happiness; and consequently, he will not augment the punishment, either in degree or duration, beyond the accomplishment of this object.

Many sinners may have been terrified by apprehensions of absolute wrath, and may have been thereby brought to a serious consideration of their future destiny; but in all such instances one of two things has followed: either this awful sentiment has given place to more worthy thoughts of God, whereby they found it possible for them to love him; or they have wandered away from all true religion. Some have run into infidelity; others into despair; some into a mad determination to take a little pleasure in sin while they have the opportunity; and others, it may be, into the soothing imagination that the great Sovereign has secured them individually from all danger of condemnation by an eternal decree; and that it is a righteous thing for them to hate heretics and reprobates, and to take pleasure in their endless misery, as their Creator does. If God punishes any beings merely for the sake of punishing them, it must be because he has a hatred against their persons, and of course originally reprobated them; therefore the doctrine of infinite wrath, of which we are speaking, and that of eternal reprobation, are essentially and immutably joined together.

It may be replied, however, that the change is in the creatures themselves; and that though God once loved them, yet he now hates them, not *as creatures*, but merely in regard to their *evil character*. The answer is easy: if he hates their evil character, it is not his will that they should have such a character; and therefore he is not unwilling that they should abandon it.

If he punishes them only because of their bad character, he will proportion the punishment to the amount of its badness, and will vary it, according as the character shall vary. If on the contrary, he fixes them in a bad character by his own power, in order to perpetuate and augment their misery, it must be because he hates them *as creatures*, and consequently hated them from all eternity.

We must briefly notice an objection, a little different from those before examined; namely, that any other view of future misery, than that of its infinity, will afford sinners a *prospect* beyond the grave; and many will continue in sin to the end of life, who otherwise might have accepted the terms of salvation.

That foolish men can pervert any thing, even *the Scriptures* themselves, *to their own destruction*, is a deplorable reality for which we have the authority of the apostle Peter; but the truth is not to be censured for their perdition; for it is by the influence of some error which they associate with it, that they are led into their inexcusable presumption and apostasy.

The doctrine which the Bible authorizes us to believe, and to urge upon mankind, is that God will inflict on the wicked eternal punishment, apportioning the infliction in every instance, to the amount of evil which each sinner shall voluntarily maintain and exercise. This will be done in order to bind down the evil for the protection of society, and to prevent, in the issue, a greater amount of misery than will be produced by this penal

operation. The evil of sin is thus exhibited in the most alarming point of view, that is possible to be conceived by the human mind; for this supposes it to involve the sinner in an immense amount of misery, under the penalty of a benevolent law, and that if the penalty should be removed, its consequences would be more dreadful still.

The force of this penalty, or otherwise a greater amount of misery by its removal, cannot be prevented, except by reforming the sinner, or by changing the nature of sin itself, and converting it into a good thing; which is a matter that Almighty power is not able to accomplish. To say that a man who really believes all this, will be influenced by his faith to persevere in sin, is to exhibit a proposition that has in it the obvious characteristics of a direct contradiction.

The same doctrine which thus exposes sin to eternal infamy, glorifies God as a Being of uncompounded excellence and perfection; for it represents his whole process as being intended to counteract sin, to subdue it, and to prevent or terminate its ravages, so far as this can be accomplished by the energy of his moral law. Through an endless futurity his whole course of action will be as fully directed against the continuance and consequences of sin, as they have been at any time since sin was first introduced into the creation. To believe the contrary, is evidently to suppose that in a future state our Creator will totally alter his measures, with a view to perpetuate the very evils which he had previ-

ously been labouring to counteract and to destroy. Hence, one of these two conclusions seems unavoidable: either that his character will have essentially changed, or that he was of the same disposition and purpose from everlasting; and consequently decreed to reprobate a large proportion of the human family. It remains, therefore, for all mankind to choose whether they will embrace the doctrine of eternal reprobation, or abandon the notion so long taken for granted without examination, that God will bind the wicked in a state of inevitable sin, for fear their torment should not be sufficiently infinite and eternal.

To suppose that a belief in God, as a truly benevolent Being, will necessarily encourage men in sin, implies, as I have before said, and will again repeat, that mankind must regard the Creator as a tyrant, in order to the reformation of our fallen race. Whence it would follow, that a tyrannical character is calculated to make a better impression upon the moral faculties of the mind, than a character of perfect rectitude and love. This contradicts all reason and revelation; and therefore the premises are false, from which it results as a necessary consequence.

Now, beloved reader, having closed the argument, we are almost at the end of our present journey. Do you ask me why I have pursued such an eccentric course? It was from an honest conviction that I ought to follow truth and evidence wherever they should lead

me, and that they have fairly conducted me to the conclusions which you have seen exhibited. I have not suppressed the conviction of my judgment in any one instance, for fear an avowal of it would not be popular; nor modified a single sentiment, with the intention to make it correspond with the opinions of any man or body of men upon earth. I cannot for my life arrive at any other conclusion, than that all such arts of policy have vain-glory and *deceit* at the bottom of them. An honest man will ingenuously state what is really his own opinion; and this "*truth in the inward parts*" is what the Almighty God requires of every soul under heaven.

The practice of suppressing the truth, or refusing to follow its evidences, or endeavouring by any modes of ingenious management to prevent others from devoting themselves to an attentive and candid examination of it, with a view to promote the influence and authority of any sect whatever, will peradventure yet be seen to be nothing else than a species of real wickedness, for which bigots of every order ought to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. To resort to any such method for the support of any Protestant church, is as perfectly inexcusable, as it is to make use of similar stratagems for the support and advancement of popery; and so far as any order of people attempt to suppress truth by authority, or to divert the public attention from the examination of evidence by sectarian management, so far they appear to be marching for-

ward in the long-trodden paths of clerical power and cunning, which have so mournfully disgraced the annals of christendom. To pretend that such a course is necessary to prevent Heresy and Schism, is precisely the old pretension which has been urged for more than twelve hundred years, and which was a principal cause of producing that long and dismal night of delusion and misery, called the Dark Ages, which will be remembered with astonishment and indignation to the end of time. Any modern denomination must first prove itself to be more infallible than Roman Catholics, before it can have any thing like a plausible excuse for resorting to a practice so well calculated to involve the Christian world in ignorance, error, superstition and crime, as that of trying to influence men to "*turn away their ears from the truth*," under pretence that the Church is our infallible mother, and that the support of her unity, her increase, her power and influence, is to be the Alpha and Omega of all our counsels, plans and operations. This is to make Christians the servants of men, and to hinder them from being in reality the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the king of truth; and "whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *just*, whatsoever things are *honest*," are essential to the support of his kingdom; and he commands all his disciples to "*think* on these things." Let Christians of all orders obey this Divine command; and let them all resolve like men who "have one Master, even Christ," that neither the assumed authority of human creeds, nor the ingeni-

ous policy of sectarians, shall hinder them from using all the means within their reach, that may be calculated to aid them in thinking on these things with due attention and fairness of mind, as responsible creatures who must give account unto God for the exercise of their mental faculties, as well as for the ordinary actions of life.

Let us now conclude by stating the principal maxims which we think have been sustained.

1. That God, when he spoke accountable creatures into life, with a clear foresight of all the developements of eternal duration, knew with infallible certainty, that the act of creation was an act of infinite benevolence.

2. That from this perfect discernment of all future results, his Divine Mind is and ever will be happy and undisturbed, in surveying all the events which take place, now and hereafter, under his grand and universal government.

3. That our murmurings and perplexities in our present state of being, in regard to our Maker's dispensations, arise from our ignorance and corruption; and that it is no less our interest than our duty, to use all the means in our power to have that ignorance and corruption removed and eradicated.

4. That the saints and angels in heaven will have such a clear knowledge of God's ability and disposition to support happiness as will fill them with perfect composure, in view of all the existing facts in immensity, and all their anticipations for eternity.

5. That opposition to God is as inexcusable in a future state as in the present; and that the penalty of the law is directed against a malignant agency, which if not thus restrained, would diffuse misery through the universe, and would even wage war against the happiness of God himself.

6. That this righteous energy of God is directed in the best manner possible to sustain universal right, and to *overcome evil with good.* It cannot be proved that our Creator does any thing to compel sinners in hell to continue wicked, unless it can be made appear that right conduct in one Being compels others to do wrong.

7. That God, by the moral display of his glory through eternal ages, will satisfy all his children of the goodness and perfection of his whole plan of government; and will make it delightfully manifest that *He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*

8. Finally, God will not connive at sin, on the one hand, nor exercise tyranny, on the other.

The only way to avoid presumption or blasphemy, is to believe without wavering, that God is, in the most perfect sense of the expression, a Good Being, whose penalties are intended to cast back upon sinners the misery which they would otherwise diffuse through the creation. To make these penalties *less* than they are, would be to produce misery by encouraging sin; to make them *greater* than they are, would be to produce misery by inflicting an amount of it which is not necessary to sustain the system on which the common happi-

ness is suspended. God will not do the one or the other; and the character displayed by his just and equal administration, is the only one which has, or can have, a wholesome and saving influence upon intelligent creatures, by drawing them from sin to holiness, from misery to happiness, and by establishing them in a state of eternal harmony with one another, and with their Benevolent Father in heaven.

NOTE.—The author had prepared an Appendix, occasioned by a late publication entitled "Difficulties of Arminian Methodism," appealing to numerous authorities to show that the Calvinistic system had been misrepresented, and that the system of the Arminians is involved in greater difficulties than those which they attempt to fasten upon the doctrine of their opponents. It was perceived, however, as the matter was being put in type, that the Appendix would have to be omitted, as it would swell the present volume considerably beyond its intended limits. This, upon reflection, is not regretted; because it is believed that the matter contained in the Appendix can, at a future time, be modified and enlarged, and be published separately to better advantage.